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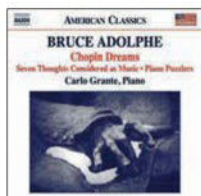
Adolphe

Chopin Dreams. Piano Puzzlers.

Seven Thoughts Considered as Music

Carlo Grante *pf*

Naxos American Classics (M) 8 559805 (64' • DDD)



It's ironic that Bruce Adolphe is best known for his *Piano Puzzler* stylistic parodies on

the syndicated public radio programme *Performance Today*, for his original compositions convey a compelling voice, high craft, authenticity, communicative immediacy and substance. This is especially true for *Chopin Dreams*, whose six sections are modelled upon specific Chopin works, yet somehow avoid sounding overly clever or referential.

The opening movement, 'New York Nocturne', features rapid right-hand fioritura that is not so much decorative as it is urgently narrative. 'Jazzurka' may draw inspiration from Chopin's A minor Mazurka, Op 17 No 4, yet Adolphe's steady left-hand chords chart thicker, more forbidding waters. The fresh pitch choices and canny asymmetry of 'Piano Popping' transcend its percussive hip hop inspiration, while 'Brooklyn Ballad' might superficially be described as Chopin's G minor Ballade filtered through Frederic Rzewski's *Four North American Ballads* (it totally works). Oddly, the insistent pulse of the concluding 'Hora' seems closer to a hip hop sensibility than a Jewish wedding.

The seven sections of *Seven Thoughts Considered as Music* each incorporate a historic literary quote in the movement title, but you don't need to know that in order to appreciate the music on its own terms. Highlights include No 1's declamatory opening with haunting chordal ostinatos midway, No 3's witty pointillism and astute register deployment, and No 7's lyrical restraint.

Carlo Grante's detailed, colourful and thoughtfully articulated interpretations will be hard to equal, let alone surpass; he clearly commits to Adolphe's multifaceted expressive range. The pianist appropriately

GRAMOPHONE talks to...

Lara Downes

The American pianist talks about the personal inspirations behind her latest project, 'America Again'

In what ways have recent events in America inspired your latest project?

This album came to life during a devastating time in America: racial tension and violence, a culture shift towards anger and division. I've been clinging to American music to illuminate what is best and brightest, and the most essential, about American culture.

Were there other personal motivations?

I'm living proof of American diversity and progress. My mom is white and my father was black, and they met because of the Civil Rights movement, which is the only reason I'm here at all. I think this music tells the story of forward movement and change in America – progress, persistence, and the diversity that's at the heart of our culture.

It's an eclectic programme. How did you narrow down your selection of pieces?

It's an insanely ambitious undertaking to reflect the scope of American diversity in 60 minutes of music! I hope that future projects



will go further and wider. But I wanted to include some favourite composers, especially some whose music isn't as well known as it should be, and then I also wanted to find music that connects deeply to this theme of the American Dream. Each of these pieces has a story to tell, whether of struggle or triumph in the pursuit of the American Dream.

Was it daunting playing music by such a stellar predecessor as Art Tatum?

Absolutely. There was no point trying to copy Tatum, both because that would be boring and because nobody can play like him. My performance of 'Blue Skies' sounds very little like Tatum's, but it is a tribute, in my own voice, to his genius and influence.

lets his hair down for nine *Piano Puzzlers*, where Adolphe ingenuously serves up traditional songs plus one Gershwin tune ('Our love is here to stay') à la Chopin. Imagine 'Deck the halls' as the Op 42 Waltz, 'London Bridge is falling down' cased within the E minor Prelude or 'The streets of Laredo' versus the B major Nocturne, Op 32 No 1, and so forth. That about defines serious fun! The composer's annotations and Naxos's warm, ample sound enhance my recommendation.

Jed Distler

JS Bach

Six Keyboard Partitas, BWV825-830

Sergey Schepkin *pf*

Steinway & Sons (M) 2 STNS30062 (132' • DDD)

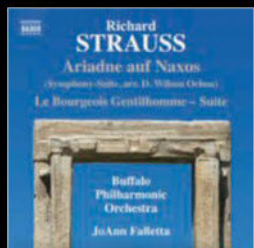


While listening to Sergey Schepkin's second recording of Bach's Six Partitas,

I found myself skipping around, comparing the same dance movements in different Partitas – say, two or three Sarabandes or Correntes – to hear the open-hearted choices Schepkin makes in response to their different moods and energies. Exploring music in this never-ending way with such an illuminating artist was in some ways more revealing than listening to them straight through, one Partita at a time.

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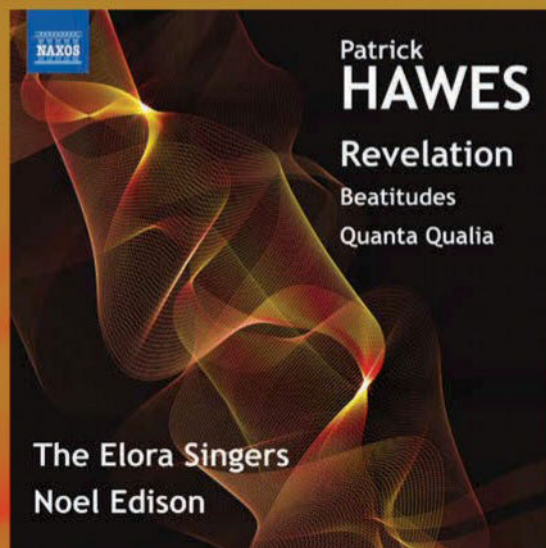
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'A florid, hedonistically embellished reading': Sergey Schepkin plays Bach Partitas

Boston-based Schepkin takes particular delight in the Allemandes and redefines Bach's 'Tempo di minuetto' in No 5, tripping the light fantastic on his multicoloured descendant of the single-manual instrument for which Bach wrote the Partitas. Unexpectedly, the Gigue is, with the exception of No 1, sobering affairs. Schepkin also responds strongly to the different tonal centres, from the life-enhancing D major of No 4, especially its splendid opening Overture, to the dour A minor in No 3.

Despite his formidable Steinway, Schepkin has a harpsichordist's feel for the magic of resonance born of slight, brief repetition; according to the booklet-notes, his performances incorporate Bach's suggestions on ornamentation given to his 'immediate circle of students'. The best illustration of this is the Second Partita, which receives a florid, hedonistically embellished reading based 'to a substantial degree', we are told, on a Bärenreiter Urtext.

The music was recorded with sumptuous delicacy of colour in Jordan Hall at Boston's New England Conservatory, in two sessions a year apart but showing no difference in their blend of sound and artistry.

Laurence Vittes

Foss

The Prairie

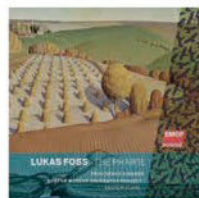
Elizabeth Weigle *sop* **Gigi Mitchell-Velasco** *mez*

Frank Kelley *ten* **Aaron Engebretsen** *bar*

Providence Singers; Boston Modern

Orchestra Project / Andrew Clark

BMOP/sound (F) BMOP1007
(53' • DDD/DSD • T)



Lukas Foss's secular cantata based on Carl Sandburg's epic poem about the farmer's prairie – cutting 80 of its 143 lines – enjoyed a spectacular opening ride. It was largely written in 1941-42, and in 1943 Serge Koussevitzky conducted the Boston Symphony Orchestra in an orchestral suite extracted from the work, before Robert Shaw led the full premiere in New York's Town Hall in May 1944; seven months later Artur Rodzinski directed the cantata with the New York Philharmonic. In 1945 *The Prairie* won the Music Critics' Circle Award as that year's most important new choral work.

The Prairie is populist in the best sense: bold, optimistic, stentorian but tender, profoundly aware of and easily seduced by American folk music, beautifully written and musically sophisticated. None of this should be surprising for someone who had been in the first of the legendary Boston Symphony conducting classes in 1940, along with Leonard Bernstein.

While Sandburg's poetry may, as Richard Dyer's affectionate booklet-notes suggest, 'bear the same relationship to the great poetry of his time as Norman Rockwell's popular illustrations do to the great paintings of his time', Foss's music projects the wider

humanitarian implications of the words with dynamic determination, rising occasionally to a Beethovenian grandeur and drawing on the lusty appetite of Americans for musical entertainment. In fact, *The Prairie* is an exact contemporary of Rodgers and Hammerstein's Broadway musical about the cowboy's prairie, *Oklahoma!*.

The performance is strong and eloquent, if slightly anonymous in the way public utterances often are, especially when they are intended to inspire national strength during times of war. **Laurence Vittes**

M Monk

On Behalf of Nature

Bohdan Hilash *woodwinds* **John Hollenbeck** *perc*

Alison Sniffin *pf/kybd/vn/hn* **Laura Sherman** *hp*

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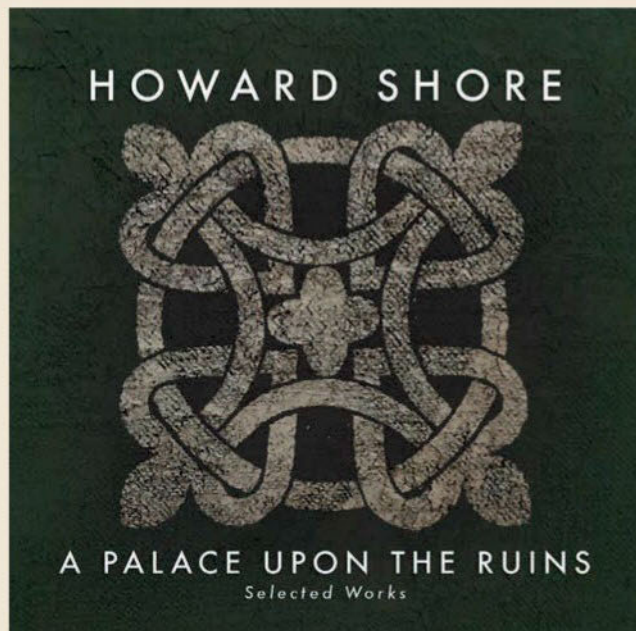


Meredith Monk has been creating novel sound worlds for more than half a century.

Her vocal innovations – minus words – continue to resonate, as is evident in *On Behalf of Nature*, a work the American composer has performed with colleagues in a theatrical context but that also reveals its haunting power in purely aural terms.

Monk calls the piece 'a meditation on our intimate connections to nature, its inner structures, the fragility of its ecology and our

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interdependence'. To portray various aspects of nature in 19 sections, she has devised a spectrum of vocal and instrumental settings, some weaving the musicians together and others for a *cappella* ensemble or instruments alone. Not that these distinctions matter: in the Monk realm, voices are instruments anyway, and often function as illuminating manifestations of sonic possibility.

Each section has a title – for example, 'Fractal Activity', 'Pavement Steps', 'Water/Sky Rant' – whose meaning may not always be apparent by way of the sounds Monk conjures. But the ambiguous narratives weave their spell, nevertheless, in the fresh unfolding of phrases, layers, and primal and heavenly subtleties. At times it is difficult to tell whether you're hearing a voice or an instrument; certain percussion (rasping stick, toy glockenspiel, bowed flexatone) exerts its special character to surprising impact.

Monk and her peers blend and share lines with seamless virtuosity, evoking the beauty of nature while suggesting cautionary tales about the need to preserve and protect what too many humans take for granted.

Donald Rosenberg

Shore

A Palace Upon the Ruins^a. Peace^b.

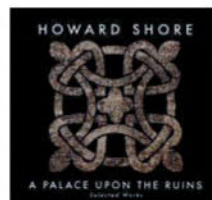
The Garden^c. Six Pieces^d. Catania^e

^aJennifer Johnson Cano, ^cClara Sanabras *mezs*

^bLang Lang *pf* ^dBenjamin Hutto *org* ^eKronos

Quartet; ^{21st Century Chamber Choir} / Ludwig Wicki; ^{Essential Voices USA Youth Workshop} / Judith Clurman; ^{players of the Bridgehampton Chamber Music Festival}; ^{RTÉ Concert Orchestra} / Howard Shore, Ludwig Wicki

Howe © HWR1020 (50' • DDD • T)



Although Howard Shore has recruited Lang Lang and the Kronos Quartet to

headline this new retrospective, it is 10 cellists from Ireland's RTÉ Concert Orchestra and two vocal ensembles who make the strongest impressions.

The most arresting music is in Shore's evocative setting of Robert Penn Warren's 'The Garden', a reflection on love and desire infused with an irrational mythic quality, in which the superb 21st Century Chamber Choir intensify the music's highly charged language before closing – 'All things that fed luxurious sense / From appetite to innocence' – with an appropriately spaced-out aura.

The most purely gorgeous music comes in Shore's use of the RTÉ strings in *Six Pieces*,

originally a co-development with the Philadelphia Orchestra, augmented in the fifth movement by mezzo-soprano Clara Sanabras's radiant singing of Elizabeth Cotnoir's specially written lines about love and renewal, and including an intricate, exhilarating, typically Kronos three minutes. In the shadow of political uncertainties, Shore's eloquent and deeply thought out *Peace*, to texts by Eleanor Roosevelt, represents more than usually a true prayer, sung with beguiling optimism by the Essential Voices USA Youth Workshop.

Recorded live at the Bridgehampton Chamber Music Festival, and previously released coupled with Alan Boustead's enchanting reconstruction of Brahms's original instrumentation for his Serenade No 1, Shore's *A Palace Upon the Ruins*, from an unspecified 'past that speaks of an unresolved trauma', is redolent of fog, ice, rain and strangely impersonal feelings of 'loss, awareness, healing and redemption'.

Written for the wedding of Sara DiMaggio and CAMI Music head Jean-Jacques Cesbron, *Catania*, played by Lang Lang, is short, intimate and affectionate.

Laurence Vittes

Wuorinen

Symphony No 8, 'Theologoumena'^a.

Piano Concerto No 4^b

^bPeter Serkin *pf*

Boston Symphony Orchestra / James Levine

Bridge © BRIDGE9474 (60' • DDD)

Recorded live at Symphony Hall, Boston,

^bMarch 2005, ^aFebruary 2007



Subtitled *Theologoumena*, Charles Wuorinen's Eighth Symphony is kind

of a sibling to his earlier symphonic poem *Theologoumenon*. The latter is defined by the composer as 'a private non-dogmatic theological opinion'. Rather ironic coming from a composer whose brand of serialism often communicates a dogmatic and fundamentalist surface style.

That said, the Eighth Symphony's sprightly first section divides the orchestra into small, diverse and continuously shifting chamber pools where instruments enter and exit faster than one can catch them. Tuned and non-tuned percussion blend with stinging piano licks that spike up certain phrases and reinforce climactic junctures. At the 3'14" mark, a solo violin provides momentary lyrical respite. The slower second part commences with twitchy solo

woodwinds against a blanket of sustained string chords; and, as the music progresses, it seems that the cor anglais, oboe and bassoon increasingly establish themselves as main characters. Much of the relatively brief third part is brisk and quiet, where rapid piano arpeggios and soft marimba and timpani flourishes dart in and out of each other like playful fireflies.

A similar chamber aesthetic dominates throughout the Fourth Piano Concerto, where solo piano phrases are often punctuated or tag-teamed by other instruments. Likewise, the piano/ensemble interaction sometimes resembles fleeting conversations, as if a dinner party host is sailing across the room, gracefully acknowledging more than one guest at a time, while keeping the agenda moving forward. Yet there are moments of relaxation, where the proverbial soloist host settles down for an extended interchange with a particular instrument or two. This is the kind of music that Peter Serkin's lean sonority, incisive touch and hair-trigger responsiveness brings to life. Considering that both works were recorded live, the Boston Symphony members' level of accuracy and alignment is downright uncanny, abetted by James Levine's quick-witted, focused leadership. **Jed Distler**

'America Again'

Arlen Over the Rainbow **Beach** From Blackbird Hills **Berlin** Blue Skies (arr Art Tatum) **Bernstein** Anniversary for Stephen Sondheim **Bloch** At Sea **Coleridge-Taylor** Deep River **Copland** Sentimental Melody **Ellington** Melancholia **Gould** American Caprice **Gershwin** I loves you, Porgy (arr Nina Simone) **Hanson** Slumber Song **R Harris** Li'l Boy Named David **L Harrison** New York Waltzes **Joplin** Gladiolus Rag **Negrón** Sueno recurrente **F Price** Fantasia nègre **Sanford** Promise **Traditional** Shenandoah **D Visconti** Lonesome Roads – Nocturne

Lara Downes *pf*

Sono Luminus © DSL92207 (67' • DDD)



The title of Lara Downes's new disc comes from Langston Hughes's poem 'Let

America be America again', which speaks of dreams and love. Certainly the music the pianist imbues with deep affection, energy and spirit can be said to embody those qualities. It also reflects the multiculturalism that is at the root of the melting-pot nation.

Of the 19 composers represented here, two were immigrants (Irving Berlin, Ernest



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'Monk and her peers blend and share lines with seamless virtuosity' (review on page III)

Bloch), four are/were African American (Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, Florence Price, David Sanford, Duke Ellington), one is Puerto Rican (Angélica Negrón) and one is anonymous (creator of *Shenandoah*). The result is a programme touching upon such genres as the waltz, spiritual, rag, jazz, American songbook, opera and more.

Downes brings as much personality to the beloved fare, including 'Deep River' and 'Over the Rainbow', as she does to the lesser-known selections. Among the latter are three vibrant pieces given their premiere recordings: Negrón's *Sueno recurrente*, David Sanford's *Promise* and Dan Visconti's Nocturne from *Lonesome Roads*.

It takes an exceptional and elastic pianist to do justice to arrangements by stellar predecessors, and Downes proves more than up to the job in Art Tatum's sophisticated version of Berlin's 'Blue Skies' and Nina Simone's impassioned take on Gershwin's 'I loves you, Porgy'. The disc also contains delectable miniatures by Morton Gould, Lou Harrison, Amy Beach and others that deserve more exposure. Downes treats every piece with requisite flair, intensity or sweetness. Hughes might have considered her artistry to be dreamy, and who's going to argue? **Donald Rosenberg**

'Amplified Soul'

M Bates *White Lies for Lomax* **Beethoven** Piano Sonata No 7, Op 10 No 3 **Rachmaninov** Moment musical No 1, Op 16 No 1 **Szymanowski** Variations, Op 3 **Visconti** *Amplified Soul*

Gabriela Martinez *pf*
Delos © DE3526 (55' • DDD)



Winner of first prize in the Anton Rubinstein International Piano Competition in Dresden and a semi-finalist in the 12th Van Cliburn Competition, Gabriela Martinez has amassed a long résumé of international recital and concerto credits prior to the release of her solo debut CD. While the word 'daring' figures in her press biography, 'careful' pretty much sums up her ginger approach to the outer movements of Beethoven's D major Sonata, Op 10 No 3. Perhaps it's the microphone's unforgiving presence that explains her tiny, tell-tale broadenings at phrase endings, the ever-so-slight hesitations telegraphing *subito* dynamics, and notey, tensionless phrasing. By contrast, the pianist's tone and colour palette open up in the great *Largo*, where the left-hand *cantabiles* and counterlines provide plenty of shape and direction. The Menuetto stands out for Martinez's canny voice-leading but the lingering caesuras at certain phrase ends are a tad mincing and predictable.

Again, the safety factor, plus a narrow dynamic range, prevent the Rachmaninov B flat minor *Moment musical*'s excellent melody/accompaniment parsing from projecting over the proverbial footlights and

poetically soaring. Mason Bates's *White Lies for Lomax* made the rounds of the 2009 Cliburn Competition, with many pianists relishing its rhapsodic and bluesy qualities. Martinez takes a gentler, less angular approach to the writing than others; and if she doesn't quite capture the inherent 'swing' of the dotted rhythms at around 1'37" and beyond, compared to Cliburn finalist Haochen Zhang's more darting, incisive effect (Harmonia Mundi), her plusher sonority and cognisance of foreground/background textures compensate.

Listeners familiar with the lush, phantasmagorical later piano works of Szymanowski will find his early Op 3 Variations harmonically conservative by comparison, almost like watered-down Brahms. While Martinez commands the notes and balances the lines capably, I prefer Martin Roscoe's steadier and more unified tempo relationships (Naxos); compare, for example, the relatively wandering beat of Martinez's Variation 9 *Grazioso* waltz next to Roscoe's firmness and focus, and you'll hear for yourself.

Dan Visconti's title-track begins tentatively and sparingly, slowly building up into Sondheim-esque patterns that traverse the entire keyboard and explode, like a kitten working its way out of a bag and emerging like a tiger, only to retreat back to square one at the end. Here Martinez finally throws caution to the wind and plays like it really matters. This selection alone explains what the fuss over Martinez is about. **Jed Distler**

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Who are today's Toscaninis – or tomorrow's?

Several years ago I visited Toscanini's birthplace, now a museum paying homage to Parma's famous conducting son. He was from a poor background, such that his mother didn't feel herself sufficiently elegant to visit him at the city's music school. The house doesn't appear too small, until you discover that the Toscaninis shared it with three other families. Toscanini's father, a tailor, used the downstairs room as a workshop.

There's something strangely powerful about a musician's birthplace. The artist invariably moves on, settling perhaps in one of the international centres of music-making, or following whirlwind careers and never really settling anywhere for long. But something of the essence of their origins invariably shapes them. In Toscanini's case, perhaps his humble beginnings helped form his humanitarianism and commitment to widening audiences. Meanwhile, Benjamin Britten's childhood house – which was turned into a pop-up museum for his centenary – looks out towards the churning, foam-flecked North Sea, which was such a crucial part of his music. There are, indeed, many composer birthplace museums – a UK itinerary alone could take in Elgar, Holst and Vaughan Williams. But a museum devoted to a conductor or instrumentalist is more rare and, in the case of Toscanini, really symbolises the esteem in which he was held in his day.

One of the reasons we're celebrating his life this month – aside from it being 150 years since his birth – is because of the pivotal role he played in shaping the relationship between classical music and broadcasting. Quick to grasp the potential for exploiting this



medium as a way of increasing and democratising audiences (just as another Italian, Enrico Caruso, had spotted the potential of recording to do likewise decades earlier), Toscanini, at the helm of his NBC orchestra, became synonymous with orchestral music-making in the public mind. As Richard Osborne reminds us in his cover story, a poll in 1937 suggested that 70 per cent of Americans knew who he was.

How many classical musicians can be said to have that same mass appeal today (expanding this thought-experiment beyond America to the wider world)? That's a sobering thought, for I doubt there are many. Daniel Barenboim perhaps? I reckon Simon Rattle might score fairly high in the UK, Yo-Yo Ma in the US, and Lang Lang in China and elsewhere. Venezuelans will likely recognise Gustavo Dudamel, and so might a fair few in other countries.

These names have earned much of their status through their outreach work. There's nothing wrong with that, but who is following in Toscanini's – and Caruso's – footsteps today when it comes to using modern technology to communicate music-making? I'd say it's probably organisations more than individuals. We've recently increased our focus on live streaming, drawing attention to the commitment by organisations as varied as the Berlin Philharmonic, Gothenburg Symphony and the Philharmonie de Paris to making their performances available online, live and archived. This, in itself, builds on the own-label boom pioneered by the LSO and others. Who knows what will come next – and who will pick up the baton, so to speak? martin.cullingford@markallengroup.com

THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS



'Take an umbrella and galoshes', Respighi warned a friend who was about to hear Toscanini conduct *The Fountains of*

Rome. It was this elemental aspect that first commended the maestro to **RICHARD OSBORNE**, who this issue makes his own anniversary enquiry into the phenomenon that was Arturo Toscanini.



'Composing with weird string tunings is a bit of an obsession with me', says **FABRICE FITCH**, who enjoyed

getting stuck into this month's Collection on Biber's *Mystery Sonatas*. 'It was about time I tackled these pieces which Maya Homburger has plausibly likened to Bach's Solo Violin Sonatas', he adds.



'Some do it by skilful orchestration, others with imaginative harmonies and textures', says

JEREMY NICHOLAS, who compiled our winter-themed Specialist's Guide. 'The variety of ways in which composers have responded to the season presented me with a heart-warming *embarras de richesses*.'

THE REVIEWERS Andrew Achenbach • David Allen • Nalen Anthoni • Tim Ashley • Mike Ashman • Richard Bratby • Edward Breen • Liam Cagney • Philip Clark • Alexandra Coghlan • Rob Cowan (consultant reviewer) • Jeremy Dibble • Peter Dickinson • Jed Distler • Adrian Edwards • Richard Fairman • David Fallows • David Fanning • Andrew Farach-Colton • Iain Fenlon • Neil Fisher • Fabrice Fitch • Jonathan Freeman-Attwood • Charlotte Gardner • Caroline Gill • David Gutman • Christian Hoskins • Lindsay Kemp • Philip Kennicott • Richard Lawrence • Andrew Mellor • Kate Molleson • Ivan Moody • Bryce Morrison • Hannah Nepil • Jeremy Nicholas • Christopher Nickol • Geoffrey Norris • Richard Osborne • Stephen Plaistow • Mark Pullinger • Peter Quanttrill • Guy Rickards • Malcolm Riley • Marc Rochester • Patrick Rucker • Julie Anne Sadie • Edward Seckerson • Hugo Shirley • Pwyll ap Siôn • Harriet Smith • David Patrick Stearns • David Threasher • David Vickers • John Warrack • Richard Whitehouse • Arnold Whittall • Richard Wigmore • William Yeoman

Gramophone, which has been serving the classical music world since 1923, is first and foremost a monthly review magazine, delivered today in both print and digital formats. It boasts an eminent and knowledgeable panel of experts, which reviews the full range of classical music recordings. Its reviews are completely independent. In addition to reviews, its interviews and features help readers to explore in greater depth the recordings that the magazine covers, as well as offer insight into the work of composers and performers. It is *the* magazine for the classical record collector, as well as for the enthusiast starting a voyage of discovery.

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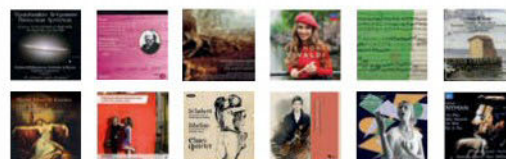
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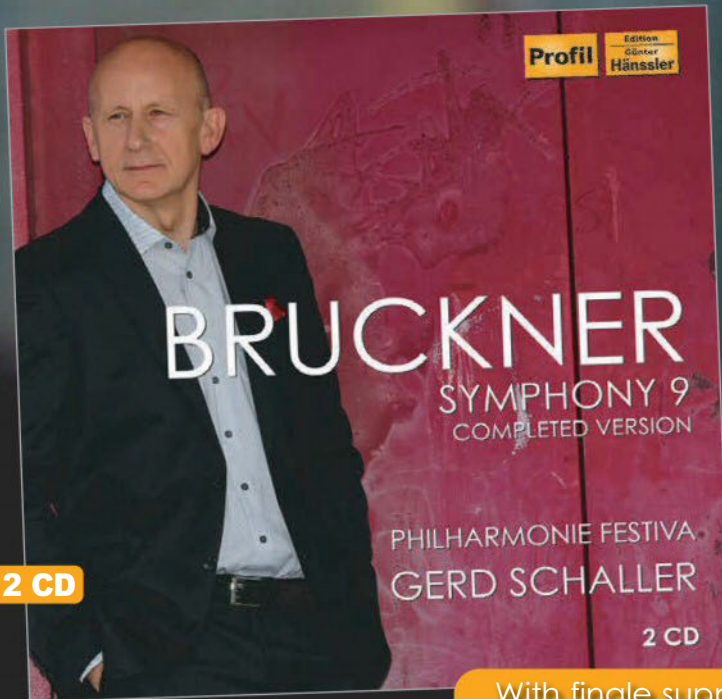
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Conductor Gerd Schaller receives the Bruckner Medal of the American Bruckner Society.

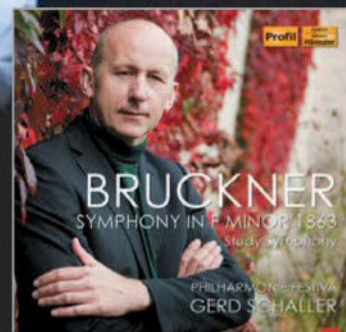

2 CD

ANTON BRUCKNER
SYMPHONY No. 9
Gerd Schaller
& Philharmonie Festiva
CD PH16089

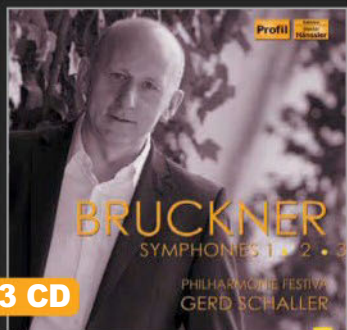
„Schaller's steady concentration
hypnotises the listener in a
positive way and one is carried
away by wave after wave of
brilliant sound.“

(Bruckner Journal London)

With finale supplemented from original
sources and completed by Gerd Schaller



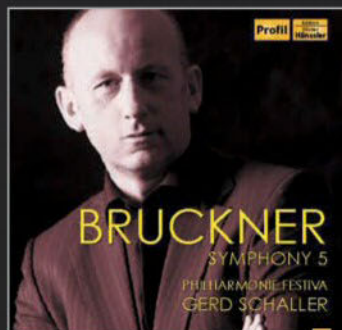
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3 CD

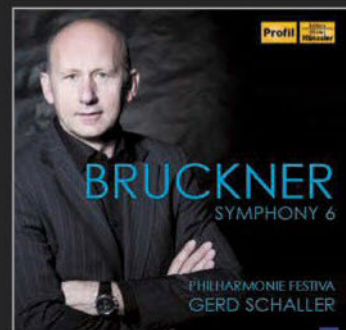
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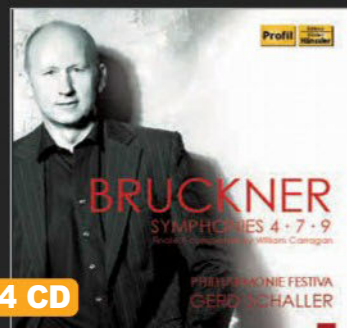
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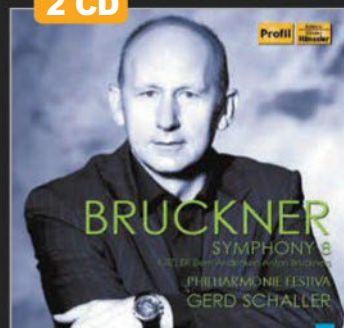
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GRAMOPHONE *Editor's choice*

Martin Culliford's pick of the finest recordings from this month's reviews



RECORDING OF THE MONTH



SIBELIUS. TCHAIKOVSKY
Violin Concertos
Lisa Batiashvili *vn*
Staatskapelle Berlin /
Daniel Barenboim
DG
► **EDWARD SECKERSON'S REVIEW IS ON PAGE 20**

This is concerto-playing of the very highest order from Lisa Batiashvili and Daniel Barenboim. Every familiar phrase somehow manages to sound both authoritative and newly discovered.



BEETHOVEN
'The Solo Concertos'
Vienna Chamber Orchestra /
Stefan Vladar *pf*
Capriccio

A complete set of Beethoven concertos – given the catalogue – is always a bold offering, but Vladar excels here, with performances full of colour and charm.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 22**



'MUSIC FOR MY LOVE, VOL 1'
Kodály Philharmonic Orchestra / **Paul Mann**
Toccata Classics

A moving project by label founder Martin Anderson to create a series of works in memory of his partner has resulted in this impressive collection of new pieces, with many more to come.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 39**



SCHUBERT. SIBELIUS
String Quartets
Ehnes Quartet
Onyx

An unexpected pairing that works really well, informing the context in which each is heard. The Ehnes Quartet's Schubert is strong and searing, their Sibelius full of dramatic reflection.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 49**



'ASPECTS'
Aquarelle Guitar Quartet
Chandos
This is a real joy to listen to, which isn't to say it's not also

reflective in places too. But the virtuosity and rapport demonstrated by this guitar quartet is a genuine delight throughout this wonderfully varied recital.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 50**



'ENCORES'
Alban Gerhardt *vc*
Markus Becker *pf*
Hyperion

A perfect tribute to Rostropovich, quite biographical in a way, with which to open in style a year which marks a decade since the great cellist's death, and which would have seen his 90th birthday.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 51**



CHOPIN Piano Works
Charles Richard-Hamelin
pf

Fryderyk Chopin Institute 'Surely this is a young pianist of whom we will hear a great deal more', concludes critic Patrick Rucker of this Canadian's Chopin recital. It's certainly a career we can look forward to following.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 55**



JS BACH Cantatas
Iestyn Davies *countertenor*
Arcangelo /
Jonathan Cohen
Hyperion
One of today's

most acclaimed countertenors, Davies demonstrates the art and beauty of voice for which he's become renowned, working once again with the superb Arcangelo.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 64**



A SCARLATTI
Missa defunctorum
Odhecaton / **Paolo Da Col**
Arcana
Skilled singing from this fine ensemble

underpin this fascinating premiere recording of an Alessandro Scarlatti work. The recording is atmospheric and engaging throughout.

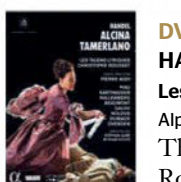
► **REVIEW ON PAGE 73**



HÉROLD
Le Pré aux Clercs
Sols; **Gulbenkian Orchestra** /
Paul McCreesh
Ediciones Singulares

Another excellent revival by Palezzetto Bru Zane of a long-lost work – performed and packaged with equal devotion – earns a heartfelt 'Chapeau!' from critic Mark Pullinger.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 86**



DVD/BLU-RAY
HANDEL Alcina. Tamerlano
Les Talens Lyriques / **Christophe Rousset**
Alpha

This Handel double bill from the sure hands of Rousset and Les Talens Lyriques really caught critic David Vickers's imagination: 'essential viewing for those who take Handel as a dramatist seriously', he concludes.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 85**



REISSUE/ARCHIVE
JS BACH Cpte Wks
Zuzana Růžicková *hpd*
Erato

A significant set celebrating this fine harpsichordist's survey of Bach's solo keyboard music.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 98**



Listen to many of the Editor's Choice recordings online at **qobuz.com**

FOR THE RECORD

Mozart tops the CD charts, and sales of vinyl outstrip digital downloads

Giant “Mozart 225” box-set is 2016’s biggest-selling CD release’ ran the headline on **billboard.com**. Was it really? Well, yes...and no.

When the story was first reported in early December, around 6,250 ‘Mozart 225’ sets had been sold, which – if you count each CD within the box as a separate album – adds up to sales of 1.25 million CDs. That is an extraordinary achievement but it isn’t quite the same thing as selling a million copies of an album and completely overlooks the fact that pop music is listened to far more on streaming platforms like YouTube, Apple Music and Spotify than on CD. (According to the IFPI, physical formats accounted for only 39 per cent of total revenues in 2015 across all genres.) And a quick look at Spotify shows that Drake – who released the most widely streamed pop album this year – receives more than 36m listeners per month; Mozart gets 2.7m.

But music isn’t a popularity contest, and it is indeed remarkable that a box-set worth more than £300 sold so many copies in just five weeks. What this story demonstrates is that there is a large audience for classical music if the product is as beautifully presented and produced as the ‘Mozart 225’ box-set is.

Another intriguing headline appeared on **theguardian.com** in early December: ‘Tables turned as vinyl sales overtake digital sales for first time in UK.’ Which, again, is not quite the story it first appears to be. Vinyl sales actually outstripped digital download sales – that is, not including

streaming – across all genres in the last week of November. Vinyl sales hit £2.4m against £2.1m for digital downloads, according to the Entertainment Retailers Association. During the same period in 2015, vinyl sales were worth £1.2m with downloads at £4.4m.

Of course, vinyl releases are much more expensive than downloads, and according to ERA, the actual album sales equated to 120,000 vinyl albums versus 295,000 digital albums. As for why sales of digital downloads have plummeted, this is mostly as a result of the rise of streaming services, which are seeing significant growth due to recent widespread improvements in internet bandwidth, making listening to high-quality streamed recordings, and even high resolution live concert and opera performances, a viable and cost-effective option for many listeners.

American soprano Renée Fleming poses with the ‘Mozart 225’ box-set collection from Decca/DG



Andrew Norman wins the \$100,000 Grawemeyer Award

Andrew Norman has won one of the most prestigious prizes in contemporary music, the Grawemeyer Award for Music, for his orchestral work *Play*. The 37-year-old’s piece was commissioned by the Boston Modern Orchestra Project. In accepting the award, he took the opportunity to address the issues of racial and sexual inequality in classical music: ‘This award has been given to three women in its 30-year history. And to me that’s kind of an issue. And in all honesty, I’m a white man and I get lots of commissions and there are systemic reasons for that, reasons we should all be talking about.’

IN THE STUDIO

Tasmin Little records Szymanowski and Karłowicz

Tasmin Little’s recent recording of Vivaldi’s *The Four Seasons* alongside Roxanna Panufnik’s *Four World Seasons* was an Editor’s Choice in the previous issue, and this month she’s back in the studio with the BBC Symphony Orchestra and Edward Gardner to record Karłowicz’s Violin Concerto and both of Szymanowski’s concertos for Chandos.

Little has recorded Karłowicz’s concerto once before, for a Hyperion release in 2004 with the BBC Scottish SO and Martyn Brabbins. Little will also be recording Szymanowski’s works for violin and piano with pianist Piers Lane in April, again for Chandos, alongside Franck’s A major Violin Sonata and Fauré’s Romance in B flat.

Celebrating post-Reformation cathedral music at St Paul’s

This month, Andrew Carwood will be directing St Paul’s Cathedral Choir and leading choristers from around the UK in a recording session for Decca Classics for a 2017 release celebrating the cathedral music that has been produced in the 500 years since the Reformation. The album will include new recordings of Parry’s *I was glad*, Rutter’s *Gaelic Blessing* and Handel’s *Zadok the Priest*, alongside choral

Hoffmann triumphs in the LSO Conducting Competition 2016

The 26-year-old German conductor Niklas Benjamin Hoffmann has won the 2016 Donatella Flick LSO Conducting Competition. He received his prize from the Duke of Kent at the end of a closely contested final, in which each of the three finalists conducted the LSO in Verdi's *The Force of Destiny* Overture, five movements from Elgar's *Enigma* Variations and a movement each from Rachmaninov's *Symphonic Dances*. Hoffmann receives £15,000 to support an area of specialist study and also becomes the LSO's assistant conductor for a year.



Tasmin Little: Szymanowski on Chandos

works by Walton, Vaughan Williams, Stanford, Purcell, Tallis and Byrd.

Farrenc's Second and Third Symphonies in Luxembourg

The symphonies of Louise Farrenc (1804-75) are little known, but Solistes Européens Luxembourg (SEL) and its music director Christoph König will be hoping to change that with a new recording for Naxos, the sessions of which take place this month in the Grand Auditorium at the Philharmonie Luxembourg.

Tom Service has written in the *Guardian* that Farrenc's Third 'deserves a place alongside Mendelssohn's symphonies in the repertoires of every orchestra as an essential embodiment of the reach and ambition of the post-Beethovenian symphony in the first half of the 19th century'. Perhaps this new recording will put the work firmly on the map.

Mahler manuscript sells for £4.5m amid Beethoven score furore

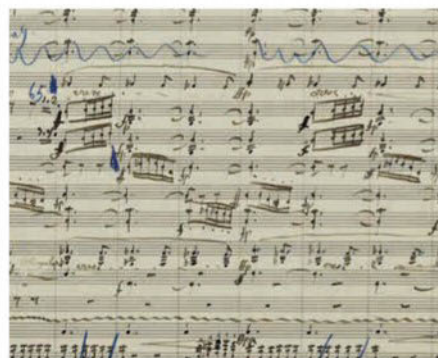
Sotheby's billed it as 'the most significant musical manuscript ever to have been offered at auction' and so it proved as the handwritten score of Mahler's Second Symphony was sold for a record price of £4,546,250.

The manuscript was offered for sale by the estate of the late Gilbert Kaplan who died last January. For Kaplan, the Second Symphony was his life's great passion. He conducted the work with many of the world's leading symphony orchestras and recorded it twice, first with the LSO in 1987 and then again with the Vienna Philharmonic in 2002, before making a recording of a version for chamber orchestra (arranged by himself) with the Vienna Chamber Orchestra in 2014.

Simon Maguire of Sotheby's said: 'No complete symphony by Mahler, written in the composer's own hand, has ever been offered at auction, and probably none will be offered again.'

On the same day, a manuscript which Sotheby's insist is in Beethoven's own hand was offered for auction, but it failed to sell after Professor Barry Cooper of the University of Manchester claimed that the manuscript was by a copyist and not the composer himself.

Cooper and Maguire clashed on BBC Radio 4's *Today* programme, with Cooper stating that there were 'several aspects which prove absolutely that it couldn't possibly be Beethoven's hand'. Maguire's responded that it was 'more a matter of Professor Cooper misreading the manuscript than anybody else, let alone Beethoven. I don't agree with his analysis of what the manuscript says'.



The manuscript of Mahler's Second Symphony

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THE 50 GREATEST SCHUBERT RECORDINGS

Our lists of the 50 greatest Mozart, Beethoven, Chopin, Handel and Bach recordings have proved tremendously popular, and so we are pleased to present the *Gramophone* guide to 50 of the finest available recordings of Schubert's music. We've included a selection of *Gramophone* Award-winning albums, Recordings of the Month and Editor's Choice discs from artists such as Artur Schnabel, Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, Paul Lewis, Bryn Terfel, Ian Bostridge, Karl Böhm and many



more. We have also included, where possible, the complete original *Gramophone* reviews, which are drawn from our database of more than 45,000 reviews. Of course, no list can ever hope to include all of the great Schubert recordings, but if you want to hear Schubert performance at its best, this list is the perfect place to start.

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Toasting the tireless, intense Toscanini

Born 150 years ago, the Italian maestro dominated the gramophone age, making a huge impact across Europe and America. Richard Osborne pays tribute to the musician who defined what it was to be a 20th-century conductor

Writing to his friend Noel Annan in 1974, Sir Isaiah Berlin related how ‘the intensity, the seriousness, the sublime *terribilità*’ of Arturo Toscanini, live in the opera house or concert hall, left him feeling that ‘this and only this was the truth’. As a philosopher, Berlin knew that ‘truth’ is a slippery concept. But conductors fascinated him. In his view, no one, not even the admired Otto Klemperer, was ‘fit to tie Toscanini’s shoelaces’. Was this just a parlour game or were there, indeed, things about Toscanini’s life and career that genuinely set him apart?

Born in 1867, Toscanini was not the earliest conductor to survive into the age of the gramophone – Nikisch and Weingartner were older – but he was the most extensively recorded and the most influential. Though he didn’t begin recording regularly until he was in his sixties, the foundations of his vast repertory were laid early, in the 1890s. The readings evolved – he was, said Gianandrea Gavazzeni, ‘tireless, never sated, never still’ – but there’s no reason to believe, as some have claimed, that there exists another, older Toscanini whose work we can never properly know.

It was the boy’s exceptional ear that led him to be accepted at the age of nine into Parma’s Royal School of Music, from which he emerged in 1885 as a gifted cellist, laden with honours. The story of the 19-year-old’s debut the next year, conducting *Aida* from memory at an hour’s notice in Rio de Janeiro, was more remarked upon afterwards than at the time. Of greater contemporary significance was his being entrusted later in 1886 with a Turin production of Catalani’s *Edmea*. The Milanese prima had been led by Italy’s foremost conductor Franco Faccio – conductor in 1887 of the first performances of *Otello* in which Toscanini was the second of the four solo cellists Verdi asks for in the Act 1 love duet. But it was the young Toscanini who impressed Catalani more. ‘He’s a true phenomenon. His career is assured.’

In Turin, where Toscanini gave the first Italian performances of Wagner’s *Götterdämmerung*, and at La Scala, Milan, where

in 1898, on Arrigo Boito’s recommendation, he was appointed music director, he introduced epoch-changing musical and dramaturgical reforms. Not everyone approved. Briefed by a hostile Giulio Ricordi, even Verdi wondered at the orchestra’s new-found prominence. But the die was cast. Elsewhere, Toscanini’s grafting of Austro-German symphonic music onto Franco-Italian operatic rootstock was similarly mould-breaking, anticipating by more than 25 years the arrival of ‘New Objectivity’ in Germany itself.

It is said that, by the end of his career, Toscanini had conducted some 117 operas and 480 concert pieces – much of this new music, for all that works like Elgar’s *Enigma* Variations, Debussy’s *La mer* and Sibelius’s Fourth Symphony

(which a New York audience booed and Toscanini promptly repeated) might seem old hat now. And all this (such was his myopia) rehearsed and conducted entirely from memory.

His core repertory, most of which is preserved on disc, ran from Haydn to the French and Italian impressionists, with nods in his final two decades to contemporary American composers and to Shostakovich whose First and Seventh Symphonies he played – the latter, the *Leningrad*, as part of a private *Kulturkampf* with Leopold Stokowski who, in the summer of 1942, was equally desperate to give the American premiere of this politically charged symphonic epic.

Toscanini’s ties to contemporary composers outside Italy were rarely close. There was a famous falling-out with Ravel over *Boléro* in Paris in 1930. ‘A minute-and-a-half too fast’, said Ravel, drawing a pocket watch from his waistcoat and stalking off. (In Ravel’s view, the faster *Boléro* was played, the longer it seemed.) Toscanini also warred with Richard Strauss over the rights to the Italian premiere of *Salome*, though fences were eventually mended and Toscanini would continue to conduct uniquely exciting performances of *Don Juan* and to treat *Death and Transfiguration* with a consideration that almost convinces one to place the work among the highest echelons of art.

*‘He’s a true phenomenon.
His career is assured’ – Catalani*

MAJOR ORCHESTRAL APPOINTMENTS

In literature, there is a great gulf between the daylight world of Homer's *Odyssey* and the more complex mythos of the Jewish Old Testament. And so it was in New York in 1908 when Toscanini, newly appointed as the Metropolitan Opera's chief conductor, was obliged to work alongside Gustav Mahler. In the event, Mahler was more understanding of Toscanini – 'It isn't our *Tristan* but this conductor knows what he wants' – than Toscanini was of Mahler, whom he disliked personally and whose psychologically troubled music was beyond his ken.

Mahler died in 1911 and in 1915 Toscanini returned to Italy, leaving the Metropolitan Opera glowing, exhausted and oddly bereft. Budget cuts were one reason for his departure; another was the soprano Geraldine Farrar with whom Toscanini had enjoyed one of his more complicated affairs. When Farrar demanded that he leave his wife and family, Toscanini took the first boat back to Europe, cancelling a reservation on what would be the *Lusitania's* tragic final voyage.

For the next five years, a combination of war and politics made a hiatus in the conductor's career. The son of a tailor who had fought alongside Garibaldi, Toscanini had grown up to be pro-Italian, anti-Fascist (in the party's non-socialist phase), anti-monarchist and anti-German. These beliefs, as uncomplicated as the man himself, would help shape the final 30 years of his career.



Conducting the NBC orchestra at its first televised appearance in March 1948

When La Scala reopened in December 1921, Toscanini was once again its music director. He retained the post throughout the 1920s, ending with a 1929 tour to Vienna and Berlin that left audiences and fellow musicians prostrate with admiration. The following year he created a similar effect with a European tour by the New York Philharmonic – the new bespoke Philharmonic whose players had been personally selected by Toscanini from the existing orchestra and the now-defunct New York Symphony. That same summer he also led revelatory, Italianate readings of *Tannhäuser* and *Tristan* at Bayreuth.

As a guest conductor in Europe in the 1930s, Toscanini commanded huge fees. For six of his concerts with the BBC Symphony Orchestra he was paid a total of £3000; this at a time when the annual salary of its chief conductor Adrian Boult was £3500 and the average national salary £200. He was, however, a huge draw. His decamping to Salzburg in 1934, as a protest against the Nazification of Bayreuth, transformed the festival's fortunes. 'Prices doubled', recalled Isaiah Berlin, 'and a lot of very fashionable people began appearing: rich Americans, Randolph Churchill in lederhosen'. But the music-making justified the cost. '*Fidelio* with Lotte Lehmann provided a quality of direct, old-fashioned sublimity which you rarely hear today.' There were also orchestral and textually incomparable performances of opera's two greatest comedies *Falstaff* and *Die Meistersinger*.

TOSCANINI'S NBC SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

In 1937 a new orchestra was created for Toscanini by NBC, a 1926 addition to



One of many NBC broadcasts; a year after the first radio concert in 1937, c90 million Americans knew who Toscanini was

RCA's commercial radio portfolio. Head of the conglomerate was media mogul David Sarnoff (1891-1971) whose decidedly unReithian mindset was summed up in his mantra, 'the value of a broadcasting organisation can only be accurately gauged by the number of viewers or listeners it has'.

NBC described the orchestra's inaugural concert on Christmas Night 1937 as the greatest radio event since the abdication of Edward VIII. 'Wagner, Beethoven, Bach, Sibelius and Brahms can now be made manifest in many a remote farmhouse', rhapsodised the *New York Times*. A poll the following year revealed that 70 per cent of Americans (around 90 million people) knew who Toscanini was.

This new mass-market aspect of the Toscanini phenomenon would send anti-market Marxist Theodor Adorno and his followers into permanent session. Virgil Thomson's not entirely implausible assertion that Toscanini's 'radical simplification of interpretative problems' had changed orchestral conducting 'from a matter of culture and its personal projection into something more like engineering' was a typical example of what was now being written by the Adorno faction. (Thomson's theory that Toscanini's fabled memory contributed to this alleged streamlining was, however, bunkum. Toscanini prepared every concert afresh, referring to the printed score and his vast library of books and related materials.)

'A splendid conductor with a phenomenal sense of sound and yet basically naive in the best sense of the word' – Klemperer

The NBC Symphony Orchestra was created from players from the company's existing Red and Blue networks, supplemented by some of the finest individual musicians in the land. Artur Rodziński was hired to prepare the ensemble but was replaced at the eleventh hour by Pierre Monteux who was alarmed by the tonal mismatches between individual sections. Some players claimed that it was not until their 1950 tour of the Americas that they became a properly functioning symphony orchestra but that may be something of an exaggeration.

The problems with NBC's studio 8H have been endlessly rehearsed. Toscanini liked its restricted ambience because on the podium he could hear everything. Unfortunately the players couldn't always hear themselves and Toscanini was often unhappy with the broadcast balances. In 1941-42 an acoustic shell was inserted and for a while an enterprising engineer Robert Johnston found some workable microphone placings. (The 1947 *Otello* is admirably clear.) Then, in 1950, 8H was turned into a TV studio and, to most people's relief, the broadcasts moved to Carnegie Hall.

FULL-BLOODED ITALIAN STYLE

On the rostrum, Toscanini was a man in thrall to his craft and the music it served. 'Put your *blood!*' he roared as he played through some Italian sweetmeat. 'I put *my* blood!' No one who played under him ever forgot that sunken brow and the eyes shining beneath 'like burning coals'.

Did such ferocity of purpose inhibit players? Bernard Shore, principal viola of the BBC SO in the 1930s, thought the opposite. And the recordings, studio and live, which EMI made between 1935 and 1939, tend to bear this out. As WR Anderson wrote in these pages, he wanted 'nothing better' than the orchestra's 1937 recording (HMV, 3/38⁸) of Brahms's *Tragic Overture*: 'I like the playing, for it reaches the drive of

BEST OF 2016 DELPHIAN

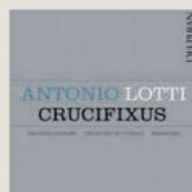


DCD34174

Viri Galilaei: Favourite Anthems from Merton Choir of Merton College, Oxford
Benjamin Nicholas & Peter Phillips

The choir's fifth Delphian recording in five years again showcases the talents of its joint directors, with Peter Phillips' love of polyphony complemented by Benjamin Nicholas's flair and commitment in some of the twentieth century's major choral works. Bookending these 'favourites' are Patrick Gowers' now iconic Ascension Day anthem *Viri Galilaei* and Jonathan Dove's newly minted *Te Deum*, commissioned by Merton College as part of the Merton Choirbook – the largest series of commissions of its kind in modern times, created in celebration of the College's 750th anniversary.

'This is sumptuous enough to keep me satisfied for the entire year' — Gramophone, CRITICS' CHOICES OF 2016



DCD34182



Antonio Lotti: Crucifixus
The Syred Consort, Orchestra of St Paul's
Ben Palmer

It is not widely known that Antonio Lotti's famous eight-part setting of the 'Crucifixus' is in fact drawn from a complete Credo setting, itself part of the *Missa Sancti Christophori* that receives its first recording here. Much of Lotti's music was written for the Basilica of San Marco in Venice at a time when expense and extravagance were not spared; rhythmic shock and awe, masterful variety, incessant invention and outrageous, luscious harmonies make it ripe for revival. The Syred Consort and Orchestra of St Paul's have collaborated with musicologist Ben Byram-Wigfield to bring it to dazzling life.

'Hearing [the Crucifixus] as it was intended to be performed casts it in a totally different light ... Clearly a labour of love, and superb musicianship'
— Presto Classical, TOP 10 DISCS OF THE YEAR



DCD34180

Stabat Mater: sacred choral music by Lennox & Michael Berkeley
The Marian Consort, Berkeley Ensemble
David Wordsworth

Lennox Berkeley's *Stabat Mater* derives from one of the most fertile and inspired periods of his compositional life. Until now the last of his major works to go unrecorded, it was written for a concert tour by his close friend Benjamin Britten's English Opera Group; hence the unusual but effective scoring for six solo voices and twelve instrumentalists. Delphian artists The Marian Consort – with five acclaimed discs of early music to their credit – now show their versatility in a *cappella* and accompanied music by both Lennox and his son Michael Berkeley.

'downright astonishing. A sort of dramatic ritual, each pair of verses a distinct vocal configuration, it reveals an inventiveness that, for all the hints of Stravinsky, [is] personal, profound and unrelenting'
— Sunday Times, 100 BEST ALBUMS OF 2016

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human affairs, and avoids any extreme note of fury, which is alien to the finest spirit of tragedy.' The young Benjamin Britten was 'astounded' by the orchestra's realisation of Debussy's *La mer*, understandably so. Play the last 90 seconds of the live 1935 'Nimrod' from Elgar's *Enigma* Variations and you will hear playing of staggering beauty and intensity.

But it was a fine dividing line. The playing during Toscanini's 1952

London Brahms cycle, a one-off encounter with the relatively new Philharmonia Orchestra, often seems tense and unyielding compared with, for example, the ease and

eloquence of the recording of Brahms's *Haydn* Variations which he made with the NBC SO earlier that same year.

Did conducting from memory take its toll? Klemperer, who hugely admired Toscanini ('a splendid conductor with a phenomenal sense of sound and yet basically naive in the best sense of the word'), thought this may have been the case. He recalled reports of Toscanini pacing his room before a Salzburg Festival *Falstaff* muttering 'if only I don't make a mistake'. He did make mistakes in rehearsal, and occasionally in concert, but they rarely amounted to much, such was the quality of his technique and the fierce levels of concentration he induced in his players. Bassoonist Hugo Burghauer, the Vienna Philharmonic's controversial chairman, recalled one such occasion. 'Toscanini misremembered the order of numbers in the Mussorgsky-Ravel *Pictures at an Exhibition*. When he gave the beat it was met with complete silence. Why? Because his gesture was so unmistakable you couldn't take it to mean anything else. That a *hundred people* should have this split-second mental contact – this happened with no other conductor in my 50 years of playing.'

TECHNIQUE AND TEMPERAMENT

The story was told to Bernard Haggin, a writer Toscanini much admired. In his *Conversations with Toscanini* (New York, 1959) Haggin describes 'the plastic coherence' imparted by Toscanini's 'sense of continuity and proportion in the continuum of sound moving in time'. 'It is with our beautiful baton that we make music', Toscanini told Pierre Monteux. 'With it, we play on our great instrument the orchestra. The more expert we are, the finer the music.' Toscanini's fluent baton technique was not exactly textbook. His effects were mainly achieved with his right arm working from the shoulder to the baton's tip, augmented by large circling movements, now this way, now the other, which indicated moments when some expansion or intensification of the drama was called for.

All this, Bernard Shore recalls, was perfectly understood. 'First, the magnificent sweep, which must be one of the most eloquent gestures ever made and which seemed to hold



Filming for the 1944 film *Hymn of the Nations*, which included Verdi's eponymous cantata

all the threads of the orchestra and to imbue them with life. Second, his not-so-apparent but extraordinarily dynamic, almost magical, preparation of his beats. With this, the most difficult changes of tempo became, even to those farthest from him, clear and unmistakable just at the right moment.' Toscanini's 1948 televised account of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony shows this well.

Toscanini was never (despite the publicity) a textual purist, though by the standards of the early 1900s he must have seemed Savonarola-like in his purges. His recordings are peppered with small alterations – and rather

more lavish ones in works such as Tchaikovsky's *Manfred* Symphony. His changes to Debussy's *La mer* were made, he said, with the composer's blessing. In fact, he learned early that the printed score is but the start and that less can be more where a composer's markings are concerned. In 1898 he had consulted Verdi about a passage in his 'Te Deum' where Toscanini felt a slowing was required. He played the passage; Verdi approved of the playing: 'A bad musician would have exaggerated that. But with a good musician I know I'm right not to have written it down.'

Toscanini was a small, energetic man with a bustling walk and a robust love of life, as his genial account of Beethoven's Septet and footage of him on tour with the NBC Symphony Orchestra or at home with his family on Lake Maggiore vividly reveal. Claudio Arrau, who disliked intensely Toscanini's music-making, found the man himself both charismatic and impressive, with a face – 'its structure was unbelievable' – of great beauty. Women must have thought likewise. 'You are a great seducer', Mistress Quickly tells Falstaff; so was Toscanini, albeit a rather more successful one. If the incandescence of his conducting of the gibbet scene in Verdi's *Un ballo in maschera* is anything to go by, the testosterone levels must have remained high even in his mid-eighties.

His wife Carla died in 1951, two days after their 54th wedding anniversary. Toscanini went on working but retired in June 1954 at the age of 87. He groomed Guido Cantelli to be his musical heir but Cantelli died in a plane crash in Paris only weeks before Toscanini's own death in January 1957. The old man was never told.

TOSCANINI'S LEGACY

It has been said that Toscanini was the musician who singlehandedly codified the 20th-century idea of what a conductor is. Those of his successors – Szell, Reiner, Karajan, Solti, Giulini: men who knew and understood his work at first-hand – carried forward aspects of his legacy in their own distinctive ways. More problematic have been the imitators, ancient and modern, who seize on the externals of the Toscanini style without mastering its inner workings –

what Yehudi Menuhin has described as 'the rhythmic spring, the flexibility, the slight unevenness which came from his profound understanding of music'. (Play in its entirety Toscanini's 1951 NBC recording of Beethoven's First Symphony and you will hear precisely what Menuhin means.)

A more detailed discussion of his recorded legacy must await next month's review of the 20-CD 'Arturo Toscanini: The Essential Recordings' on RCA. This has been compiled by Harvey Sachs, author of the standard biography, and the late Christopher Dymont, whose *Toscanini in Britain* is published by Boydell. Among English-language writers who knew Toscanini, Haggin is not to be missed; there is also an outstanding chapter on the conductor in Roland Gelatt's book *Music Makers* (New York, 1952).

'It is with our beautiful baton that we play on our great instrument the orchestra' – Toscanini

As a symphonic conductor, Toscanini was best known for his Beethoven. Writing in 1939, Neville Cardus described it as 'the most musically comprehensive Beethoven of our time, if not the most poetically comprehensive'. As the long view of history teaches, other Beethovens are available. In Verdi he was supreme. To this day his *Otello* is the most elemental (and textually articulate) on record. But in this anniversary year, let Puccini pay the final tribute: 'Toscanini is now really the best conductor in the world', he wrote in 1922. 'He has everything: soul, poetry, flexibility, dash, refinement, dramatic instinct; in short, a real miracle.' And so he was: a miracle indeed. **G**

The new 20-CD Toscanini box-set on RCA will be reviewed in Reissues next month

SAMPLING TOSCANINI

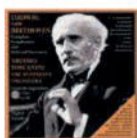
The great maestro revealed across five varied recordings



'Toscanini: The HMV Recordings'

BBC Symphony Orchestra
Warner Classics © 6 723334-2

A selection of orchestral works by Mozart, Beethoven, Rossini, Wagner, Brahms, Debussy, Elgar and Sibelius.



Beethoven: Complete Symphonies & Selected Overtures

NBC Symphony Orchestra
Music & Arts © 5 MACD1275 (4/14)

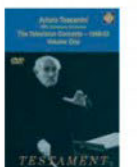
Toscanini's legendary 1939 cycle, recorded between October and December after spending more than four decades of conducting Beethoven, defines the conductor's approach to the composer.



'Toscanini conducts Verdi'

Soloists; NBC Symphony Orchestra
RCA © (12 discs) 8888 379779-2

Toscanini conducts operas including *Otello*, *Falstaff*, *Aida* and *La traviata*, plus the Requiem.



'The Television Concerts - 1948-52' (Vol 1)

Soloists; NBC Symphony Orchestra
Testament © DVD SBDVD1003 (5/06)

Beethoven's Ninth, the 'Choral', plus Wagner excerpts: *Lohengrin*, *Tannhäuser*, *Siegfried*, *Götterdämmerung* and *Die Walküre*.

OPUS ARTE



HAMLET SHAKESPEARE Royal Shakespeare Company

"This is a landmark production: Paapa Essiedu is the first black actor to play Hamlet for the RSC in its 55-year history. He is charismatic, capricious and compelling: an impulsive, arresting presence at the heart of a production that reframes the dilemmas in the play by setting it in an unnamed African state." (The Financial Times).

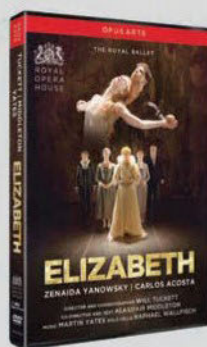
DVD | BLU-RAY



GURRE-LIEDER SCHÖNBERG Dutch National Opera

This setting of the mediaeval Danish legend of Gurre Castle – a love triangle between King Waldemar, his mistress Tove and a jealous Queen – gains an innovative new dimension in this first-ever staging of the work, directed by Pierre Audi.

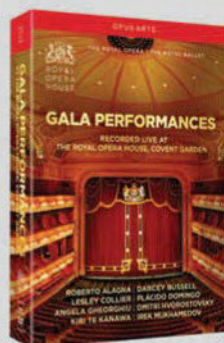
DVD | BLU-RAY



ELIZABETH Royal Opera House

Choreographer Will Tuckett and playwright and librettist Alasdair Middleton co-direct this special performance, which brings together Royal Ballet Principals Zenaïda Yanowsky and Carlos Acosta with actors Laura Caldow, Sonya Cullingford and Julia Righton in an atmospheric and nuanced tribute to the remarkable life of Queen Elizabeth I.

DVD



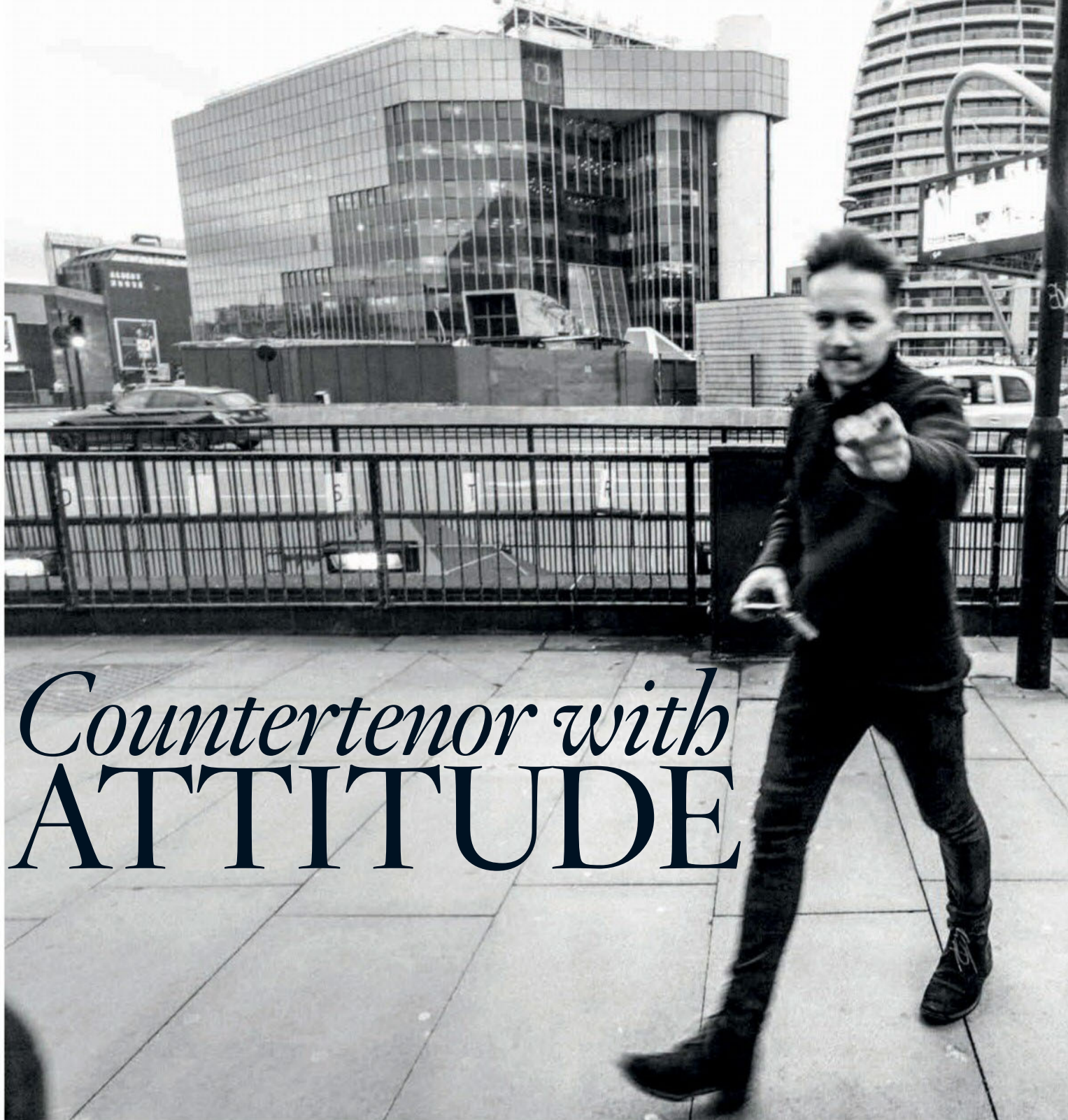
GALA PERFORMANCES Royal Opera House

Two unforgettable gala concerts from the stage of the Royal Opera House. Includes performances from Plácido Domingo, Kiri Te Kanawa, Darcey Bussell and Irek Mukhamedov, performing highlights from opera and ballet favourites such as *The Queen of Spades* and *Eugene Onegin*, *The Nutcracker* and *The Sleeping Beauty*.

2 DVD SET

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Countertenor with ATTITUDE

Iestyn Davies is in demand as a recitalist, opera singer and West End star. But, says Lindsay Kemp, now with a Bach disc to add to his name, this countertenor still has his feet firmly on the ground

‘**T**hat’s the beauty of recording. You can do it the way pop singers do. You know, in the wrong order.’ Iestyn Davies – whose Wigmore Live recital recording won a 2014 *Gramophone* Award – means what he says. ‘There’s a shame among classical musicians about doing small takes but, with everything you do live going up on the internet for everyone to hear for nothing, if you’ve

got a chance to do something properly in the studio it’s important that you do.’ The recording he is talking about right now is his latest collaboration with Jonathan Cohen and his band Arcangelo for Hyperion: solo alto cantatas by Bach, which present technical challenges enough for any concert. *Ich habe genug*, for instance, is ‘much harder to do live. The final aria is very low, coming after 20 minutes, and quite fast. Even on a recording that’s tough, but at least then you can get it out of context, and get it right.’



PHOTOGRAPHY: GERARD COLLETT

Davies has been getting it right for a while now. Not just the notes, but the career too – a career that is full of opportunities, all of which he seems perfectly able to take smoothly in his stride. He has performed and recorded core countertenor repertory such as Dowland, Purcell and Handel, and curated programmes such as his disc of ‘Arias for Guadagni’ (another *Gramophone* Award-winner in 2012). His Wigmore Hall residency, meanwhile, led to two live discs and also included a work commissioned from Nico Muhly. And let’s not forget his stage roles in Handel and in major new operas by the likes of George Benjamin and Thomas Adès, or how he shared the stage with Mark Rylance in the highly successful stage show

Farinelli and the King. *The Observer* has celebrated the fact that ‘he can sing, whether full blast or hushed *pianissimo*, with a strength, steadiness of tone and musical confidence almost unknown in a voice type which has tended...to prefer ethereal frailty as a calling card’, while in these pages, back in 2009, Michael McManus wrote that Davies ‘can dominate a stage with all the physical poise and balance that characterises the best singers...He also has a voice to die for.’

Impressively, he has achieved this with a professionalism that is both unfussy and efficient. I meet him at the end of a day spent rehearsing for a semi-staging of Purcell’s *The Fairy Queen*, a one-off performance at London’s Barbican that has nevertheless meant several days in an Airbnb apartment away from his home in York, but he is relaxed, unruffled, and more than willing to talk about Bach. First of all, he is happy to admit that it was Andreas Scholl’s 1997 recording of the achingly beautiful *Vergnügte Ruh*, *beliebte Seelenlust* and the punchier but still exquisite *Widerstehe doch der Sünde* that first inspired him to become a countertenor. So beautiful are these pieces that voices as naturally honeyed as Davies’s or Scholl’s can easily get away with, as Davies puts it, ‘slipping into jobbing choral-singer mode of just loving the sound’. But there is more to it than that,

‘I remember Janet Baker saying: “Don’t try and put music into Bach, it’s already there.” So with Bach you can’t go off into flights of fancy like you can with Handel’

a fine line to be trodden between over- and under-interpretation. ‘With each aria there’s so much drama and character that you have to distance yourself from getting obsessed with how you sound. It’s such beautiful music, and sometimes you just have to forget that. When you see the text in front of you, and the way it’s been set, it’s very important to pay attention to it.’

And yet it is possible to go too far. ‘I remember Janet Baker once saying: “Don’t try and put the music into Bach, it’s already there.” So with Bach you can’t go off into flights of fancy like you can with Handel, and whereas with Handel and most other Baroque composers you sit on top of the texture, with Bach the voice is in there as part of the framework of the orchestra, the bass-line and you. You’re part of the texture and it’s more about the communal spirit of the aria. It’s perfect chamber music in a way.’ True enough; in the final aria of *Widerstehe* the singer is one voice in a three-part fugue.

Does the answer lie, then, in finding and feeling an authenticity of spirit? ‘What appeals to me about Bach’s arias in general, in the cantatas, in the Passions, is that there seems to be a certain aesthetic within the music, whether it be to the Spirit or the Holy Ghost or something similar. But *Vergnügte Ruh* [which sings of a desire to leave the world and all its horrors and trials behind] also borders on the evangelical in a way; you can really feel it in the uplifting final aria about being taken away to Jesus. And in *Widerstehe* the singer is more the preacher in the pulpit.’

Widerstehe indeed, with its warnings to resist sin and temptation, is a reminder that Bach’s church cantatas were designed as musical complements to the Sunday sermon. ‘You get words in there like “Sodomsäpfeln” (“Sodom’s apples”) which you certainly don’t get in Handel! But it’s a joy to sing these sorts of angular texts sometimes against such beautiful music; the word-painting is much more interesting than in Handel. Bach’s sense of humour and joy in life also come



Davies as the eponymous castrato in *Farinelli and the King* alongside Mark Rylance's acclaimed Philippe V of Spain, whose mental torment is soothed by Farinelli's singing

through in the things he sets. If he puts a sexy dance tune to a text about Satan, as he does at the end of *Widerstehe*, perhaps he's saying that he's living with the Devil in that moment. He knows the audience or congregation is not going to interpret everything [to this degree], but he also knows that if you study this music you can begin to inhabit it.'

With a solid musical background – his father Ioan was cellist in the Fitzwilliam Quartet and Iestyn was a chorister and later a choral scholar at St John's College, Cambridge, before studying at the Royal Academy of Music – Davies is a fast and

reliable learner, and his increasingly busy career in operas both Baroque and modern gives him plenty of opportunities to get inside the music, and even on occasion to work with the composer. Recent examples include Thomas Adès's powerful *The Exterminating Angel*, premiered in Salzburg last summer, and George Benjamin's *Written on Skin* in revivals in Vienna, Paris and Munich. How well does he think modern-day composers write for countertenor? 'Well first of all, I have to say that George's opera is simply the best of its kind written in the past 30 years and an absolute joy to sing. The countertenor

has one of three main roles, and I think George wrote it for that voice because of the nature of the character he had in mind. He's quite specific, and Bejun Mehta sang it first because George liked his voice. But the first thing you notice when you sing it now is that it's extremely well written for the countertenor. It's also difficult, because he's such a precise composer and the music won't work if you're even slightly out with it. He's as precise as a conductor, and will often take you through every bar, but then he'll say "Now go and make it your own" which is frustrating but also good because it challenges you!

'Nico Muhly has also written stuff for me [most recently *Sentences*, a 30-minute cantata on episodes in the life of Alan Turing, premiered at the Barbican in 2015], and of course the more you and a composer get to



Recording Bach cantatas at St Jude's, London, in May 2016: Davies and Arcangelo's leader Cecilia Bernardini



Charles Daniels, Iestyn Davies and Ashley Riches in *The Fairy Queen* at the Barbican

know each other, the less they're writing for you just because you're a countertenor. Nico, who's obsessed with Alfred Deller and really wanted to write for me, was asking at every point: "Is this OK? Is this OK?" With Tom's it's very different. He'll write anything and say: "That's the countertenor role, now sing it!" And it'll be virtuosic, but then if you go to him and say "It's hard!" he'll ask "Which bit?" – and then when you demonstrate, he'll say: "Well you just sang it!" If your body can do it, that's enough for Tom. That's frustrating in a different way because you don't want to damage your voice, but again it's good because it means he's looking for

'With Mark Rylance, it's about timing – it's not what he says, but how he says it. Singers can do similar things with their breathing'

extremes of expression in the voice. And I've found you can get used to anything!

Operas will continue to keep Davies busy in 2017. There are revivals of *Written on Skin* in January and *The Exterminating Angel* in April, both at the Royal Opera House. Then he will be doing Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at Aldeburgh. Later in the year, it is rumoured, there will be a Broadway run of *Farinelli and the King*. Claire van Kampen's play proved so successful at London's Sam Wanamaker Playhouse in 2015 that it transferred to the West End later that year; in it, Davies played the singing voice of the famous 18th-century castrato opposite Mark Rylance as King Philippe V of Spain, whose mental turmoil the great singer soothed. For the ever-alert Davies, the experience of being in the production was another stage in his education. 'It's sort of half-like being in an opera, and half-like being in a concert, but you never get as many goes at performing something as you do in the run of a play. Actors do the same thing every night, so as the run goes on they can start to change things slightly. Someone like Mark Rylance can get different responses on different nights, without you necessarily being able to tell why. He's always reacting with the audience, and a lot of it is about timing. You realise that when he says a line it's not always about *what* he says but *how* he says it, and as singers we can do certain similar things with our breathing. Mark himself is very musical, and says he was inspired as an actor by the way singing is phrased, so the parallels are definitely there. It has been a very valuable lesson in the art of performance.'

► To read Gramophone's review of Iestyn Davies's Bach disc, turn to page 64



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"Levy plays to perfection."
Classic FM Magazine

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GRAMOPHONE

RECORDING OF THE MONTH

Edward Seckerson is enthralled by violinist Lisa Batiashvili's master storytelling in Tchaikovsky and Sibelius, magisterially accompanied by seasoned collaborator Daniel Barenboim



Sibelius • Tchaikovsky

Sibelius Violin Concerto, Op 47

Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto, Op 35

Lisa Batiashvili *vn*

Staatskapelle Berlin / Daniel Barenboim

DG © 479 6038GH (70' • DDD)

There is no violinist currently playing the high end of the international circuit that I would sooner go out of my way to hear than Lisa Batiashvili. There is something so super-intuitive about her playing that, while she is performing, the brilliance of her technique, the range of her colours and the sheer invention of her phrasing are subsumed into the intrigue (there seems to be no other word) of her musical storytelling. The last thing on the listener's mind is how she tells that story but rather where it might be leading. Everything feels 'in the moment', a quality of improvisation like music created in the playing of it. Her musicality always comes with an element of surprise.

What strikes me (and indeed surprised me) more than anything about this popular coupling is the distinctive character that she and her seasoned collaborator Daniel Barenboim find for both pieces. For sure, the pieces themselves belong in different sound worlds – and that could hardly be more apparent from the nature of the sound that soloist and orchestra have fashioned here – but it is the very particular musical personalities that make Tchaikovsky and Sibelius who they are that Batiashvili explores so tellingly.

The Tchaikovsky exudes a melancholic warmth fusing



Everything feels 'in the moment', a quality of improvisation like music created in the playing of it

classical and romantic sensibilities. That's a crucial balance in performing this music. The first statement of the first subject is tender and understated, the second a little more persuasive, but never is the poise and

purity of Tchaikovsky's innate classicism compromised. There is undeniable relish for the expressive opportunities that the piece throws up at every turn but for all the colour and invention of Batiashvili's playing it is never, ever self-regarding.

It's interesting, too, that the generosity of Barenboim's contribution, though on the well-upholstered side as you might expect from this seasoned traditionalist – the two big Polonaise-like *tuttis* are definitely at the Imperial end of the Russian experience – is still alive to Batiashvili's vibrancy. The first-movement cadenza is a story within a story for her, an opportunity to muse on that which is at the heart of the work. And it finds release in the lovely central movement, so full of fantasy, with muted and beautiful *pianissimos*. It's a Pushkin short story.

Batiashvili's tempo for the finale is on the articulate side of dashing, with nimble footwork and pyrotechnics that have shape and agility, not just crowd-pleasing brilliance (though that is, of course, there in spades). The folksy 'drone' episodes with songful bassoon (Tchaikovsky's sad but wise fool) are not overdone – characterisation not caricature – and the passage in harmonics just before the home stretch brings Barenboim's limpid Berlin woodwinds deliciously to the fore.

With the Sibelius the temperature drops dramatically – not in terms of intensity but in accordance with the nature of the landscape. The elemental chill is in part written into the music, of course, but orchestrally Barenboim and his Berliners



'On the articulate side of dashing': Daniel Barenboim and Lisa Batiashvili



From well-upholstered Tchaikovsky to the elemental chill of Sibelius: Daniel Barenboim and the Staatskapelle Dresden conjure varied sound worlds

pick up on the colour and cast of the writing, giving it a sterner, craggier hue. Viola colour comes through notably and effectively in the first movement.

Batiashvili homes in here on the ethereal quality of the lyricism. The beautiful opening theme at first seems indivisible from the oscillating icy haze of the orchestral violins and maintains its mystery where other players might be inclined to exploit its beauty in ripper tone and richer, more 'expensive' phrasing. That quiet intensity is maintained throughout achieving an extraordinary other-worldly quality in the recurring passage which feels its way like disappearing footsteps in the snow just prior to the first-movement coda.

But equally Batiashvili is tuned in to

the inherent wildness in this music and the fact that, when Sibelius wrote it, his own technique as a violinist (in keeping with many solo violinists of the day) had not yet caught up with what he was writing. The intensity that is so darkly expressive in the slow movement finds release and later abandon in the sometimes insane passagework of the finale. There is one particularly thrilling ascent to the upper reaches of the E string just before the stark chordal punctuations of the final page.

So a disc full of beautiful and inventive violin-playing from one of the world's most mesmerising talents. You can never second-guess Batiashvili, and that in part is what makes her so perpetually fascinating as a musician.

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Editor's Choice

Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings reviewed in this issue

Orchestral



Charlotte Gardner falls for Nemanja Radulović's Bach

'These are passionate readings that yank the great JS down from the heavens back into visceral humanity' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 22**



Rob Cowan listens to Zoltán Kocsis's final recording:

'Having a pianist-composer on the rostrum seems to have added an extra dimension to the interpretation' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 25**

Artyomov

On the Threshold of a Bright World.

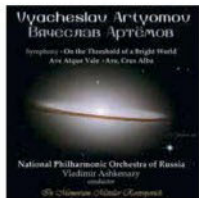
Ave atque vale^a. Ave, crux alba^b

^aRostislav Shatayevsky *perc* ^bHelikon Theatre Choir, Moscow; National Philharmonic Orchestra of Russia / Vladimir Ashkenazy
Divine Art © DDA25143 (52' • DDD)

Artyomov

Gentle Emanation^a. Tristia II^b

^bPhilip Kopachevsky *pf* ^bMikhail Philippov *spkr*
Russian National Orchestra / ^aTeodor Currentzis,
^bVladimir Ponkin
Divine Art © DDA25144 (71' • DDD)



Now in his mid-70s, Vyacheslav Artyomov is best known for his six cosmic-mystical-syncretic symphonies, which together make up one of the most distinctive continuations to the post-Soviet Russian branch of the genre. Two of those symphonies make welcome appearances here in characterful performances, vividly recorded.

On the Threshold of a Bright World starts with subterranean heavings, as if reluctantly giving birth to pitch, motif and harmony. *Gentle Emanation* summons the listener more imperiously, with Ustvolskaya-style drum strokes followed by high-register, cloud-like drifting, likewise promising great things to come. As for fulfilling that promise, Artyomov's favoured unbroken spans of 35 to 40 minutes certainly test the concentration. But he has the courage of his convictions. He styles each symphony 'in continuous episodes', evidently unconcerned that episodic, in the traditional conception, is the opposite of symphonic; and for the most part his inventive powers carry him over the divides. For ears attuned to the likes of, say, Adès or Benjamin, or symphonists such as Nørgård, Ruders, Tüür and Aho, Artyomov's post-Berg-and-Scriabin language, with its rich chromatic harmonies cut across by flashes of

expressionist lightning, may simply sound too coarse. But this is music that belongs in the frankly declamatory world of Schnittke and Gubaidulina, and it's surely hard to deny its communicative urgency and grandiloquence. When the symphonies' opening gambits return, there is an unmistakable sense of a journey travelled and of emotional states transfigured into spirit.

The fill-ups are not unproblematic. *Tristia II*, with its narration of Gogol poems (unfortunately not reproduced in the booklet), wears its spirituality so obviously on its sleeve that I suspect many will find it more embarrassing than inspiring. In the percussion *concertante* *Ave atque vale* the combination of echoes of Mahler's Tenth with toy instruments à la Pärt's Second Symphony (which figure also in *Gentle Emanation*) tests my tolerance levels to the limit. The hymn *Ave, crux alba* sounds as though patched together from Mahler's Eighth ('Blicket auf'), bits of Allan Pettersson and a pre-echo of the soundtrack to *Love, Actually*.

Having said that, all the performances here are terrific, and they surpass in sonic terms the Melodiya recordings (and Olympia reissues) that were my introduction to the composer. Robert Matthew-Walker's booklet-notes argue at passionate length for Artyomov's uniqueness and importance. **David Fanning**

JS Bach • JC Bach

JC Bach Viola Concerto (reconstr H Casadesus)

JS Bach Concerto for Two Violins, BWV1043^a.

Violin Concerto, BWV1041. Orchestral Suite No 3, BWV1068 – Air. Solo Violin Partitas: No 2, BWV1004 – Chaconne; No 3, BWV1006 – Gavotte. Toccata and Fugue, BWV565^b

Nemanja Radulović, ^aTijana Milošević *vns*

Double Sens; ^bLes Trilles du Diable

DG © 479 5933GH (63' • DDD)



It must be said that Nemanja Radulović's Bach and I did not get off to a good start.

The disc opens with the D minor Double Violin Concerto, and while the extraordinary speed of the opening *Vivace* is impressive, when each phrase is dust on the horizon before your dizzied ears have even registered its approach then I'd say things have gone too far. However, read on, because after a few bars of the gentler *Largo ma non tanto* I fell in love. This was partly down to Radulović's truly exquisite technique and tone, but ultimately it was his attitude to Bach that did it.

In the Baroque world it sometimes feels as though we've sanctified Bach to the point of his music becoming a bit like a Patek Philippe watch – 'you never really own it, you merely look after it for the next generation'. That's not to say that there aren't wonderful period performances out there, but a Bach recording that speaks as much of its musicians as of what we think we know about Bach feels very invigorating.

So. Vibrato? Absolutely. Portamentos? Yes. Tempo and metre? Let's be exciting. It's not overdone, and it is couched within a Baroque performance framework. Still, there is a spirit of freedom, and the results are passionate readings that yank the great JS down from the heavens back into visceral humanity. You can hear this particularly in Aleksandar Sedlar's almost rock-guitarist style arrangements of the Toccata and Fugue and the Chaconne, where both Double Sens and Les Trilles du Diable are with Radulović every step of the way. Another highlight is the Solo Partita No 3's Gavotte, where I found myself hanging on every gloriously glowing note as Radulović's stunningly coloured part-writing unfurled.

I'll never be convinced that the D minor's *Vivace* is ripe for land speed record attempts, but as far as Radulović's approach goes, I'm sold. **Charlotte Gardner**

Beethoven

'The Solo Concertos'

Piano Concertos Nos 1-5. Triple Concerto, Op 56^a. Violin Concerto, Op 61^b. Two Romances^b

ab **Isabelle van Keulen** vn ^a **Julian Steckel** vc
Vienna Chamber Orchestra / Stefan Vladoar pf
 Capriccio Ⓟ ④ C7210 (4h 14' • DDD)



If you fancy a set of the Beethoven piano concertos that's suitable for listening to at a single sitting, then look no further. The ingredients are ideal for the job: abundant energy; bold, clear-sighted interpretation; brilliant though intelligently deployed pianism; poetic handling of the various slow movements; vital conducting and orchestral playing that fits the 'chamber orchestra' template like a glove. I loved it; and, while hardly tempted to bin my Arraus, Brendels, Kempffs, Serkins or Schnabels (to mention merely a handful of classic complete sets of the complete piano concertos), Stefan Vladoar's refresher course held me captive for the duration.

The First Concerto provides a convenient initial sampling point, with its well-paced, dynamically inflected opening *tutti* and the way Vladoar, having conducted what we've heard thus far, announces himself (2'37") – crisply, elegantly and with confidence. Note the badinage with the orchestra, the suddenly drumming accompaniment at 3'40" and the gaiety of the closing Rondo.

Vladoar finds more light and shade than do many of his rivals in the Second Concerto's opening and his way with the first movement is abundantly playful. Again the closing Rondo, truly a *molto allegro*, serves as a celebratory finale. Had I to cite two of the slow movements that Vladoar performs with especial sensitivity they would be the romantic hearts of the Third and Fifth (*Emperor*) concertos, the former at 2'28" where the music assumes an almost *bel canto* level of lyrical intensity. Again, note how Vladoar faces his orchestra to cue some expressive interlinking passages. The *Emperor's* *Adagio* is similarly poignant and with every note perfectly placed.

The sublime busyness of the Fourth Concerto's first movement is kept fully up to speed, not unlike Serkin's mono CBS recording (under Ormandy – nla). In the slow movement I would have welcomed rather more gravitas around the growling interjections that encourage the soloist's humble pleading – Vladoar keeps his strings rather too light and clipped – and when the piano trills that follow prompt a spiralling swirl of reaction, you should feel emotionally drained. Here you don't.

The Triple Concerto with violinist Isabelle van Keulen and cellist Julian

Steckel has the intimate, animated feel of a family affair about it – you hear so much. Then van Keulen goes solo in the Violin Concerto, using her own arrangement of the first-movement cadenza that Beethoven wrote for his piano version of the work. It's a good performance, very good at times, intelligent, mobile, tonally bright and with excellent trills, and van Keulen makes that cadenza sound fairly convincing (not everyone does). She adds the two Romances, the Second of which sounds uncomfortably fast.

To be honest I'd treat this last CD as something of a bonus: Vladoar's conducting is again excellent but it's his playing and conducting of the piano and Triple concertos that really makes the grade. The sound is very realistic, though be warned that the piano is very much upfront. An exceptional set. **Rob Cowan**

Beethoven

Symphonies – No 1, Op 21; No 7, Op 92

Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra / Nikolaus Harnoncourt

Orfeo Ⓟ C924 161B (70' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Felsenreitschule, Salzburg, August 29, 2003



The Vienna Philharmonic gave this concert a little over a year after

Simon Rattle had recorded the nine symphonies for EMI. The experience should have stood them in good stead; in the event, Harnoncourt made more radical demands. Less in terms of sonority – here is recognisably the same orchestra, or at least the same instruments, that played the Seventh in Furtwängler's final concert at the Salzburg Festival almost half a century earlier – than of articulation. Rattle searches for a legato to knit together the three opening statements of the Seventh's introduction. Harnoncourt gives each one its own space. *Cantabile* is parsimoniously reserved for second themes and trios.

Few listeners who prize Norrington or Fricsay in the First will warm to this one, though Harnoncourt has a Haydnesque trick up his sleeve with the *Andante*, which creeps in as stealthily as a worker late to his desk, and continues with an ingenuous air – 'Who, me?' – before gravely turning to more serious matters in the minor-key development. The cartoonish exaggeration of the finale, between staccato and legato, *forte* and *piano*, would make it a perfect replacement for whichever Czech pickup band played it to announce each episode of

Ludwig, the '70s animated series starring a robotic egg.

In the monumental, often austere effect of these performances, the acoustic of the festival's Felsenreitschule must play its part. The radio microphones do not pick up every last moving part so scrupulously as the engineers for the live recorded cycles by Harnoncourt and Rattle, both working in more sympathetic Austrian acoustics.

The Seventh leaves a much stronger impression. Harnoncourt ferrets out a Schubertian ostinato from the inner strings at the climax of the exposition; indeed, the whole symphony is played as a precursor of the *Great C* major, with an *Allegretto* of ever-deepening pathos, not a whit less gripping than Furtwängler, rhythmically much steadier than Rattle. As in many *Eroica* performances, the tension is never fully dispelled by the expulsion of energy in the Scherzo and finale; they bring the fewest surprises, though they do not speak of routine, rather a happy accommodation of independent minds. Applause is retained, and deservedly so. **Peter Quantrill**

Symphony No 7 – selected comparisons:

VPO, Rattle (4/03⁸) (EMI/WARN) 376383-2

VPO, Furtwängler (ORF) C293 921B

Beethoven

Symphony No 9, Op 125

Sigrid Plundrich sop **Mary-Ellen Nesi** mez **Colin**

Balzer ten **Simon Tischler** bass-bar **Tafelmusik**

Chamber Choir and Baroque Orchestra /

Bruno Weil

Tafelmusik Media Ⓟ TMK1030CD (66' • DDD • T/t)

Recorded live at Koerner Hall, Royal Conservatory, Toronto, February 4-7, 2016

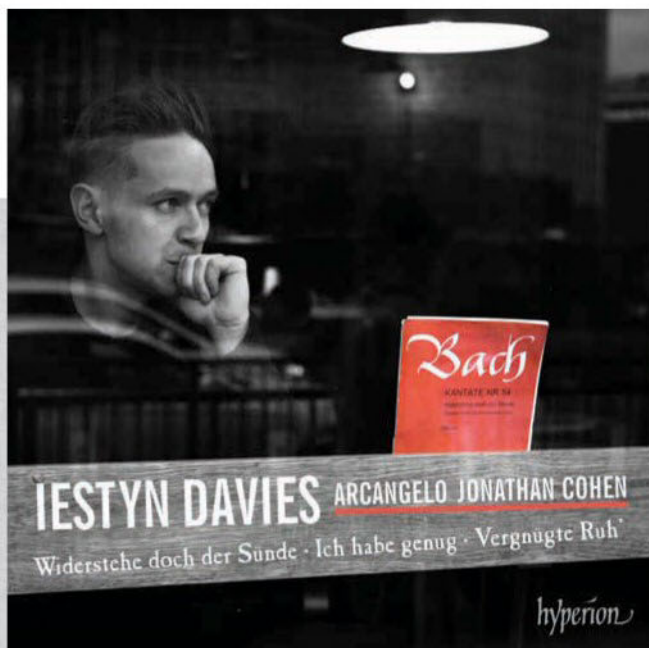


Bruno Weil's initial basic tempo, held with conviction but not rigidity through the

first movement's vicissitudes, is crotchety=78: much less headlong than Toscanini or Gardiner (or Beethoven), just up a notch from Weingartner, Abbado and Wand. In fact, much here that makes plain good sense reminded me of Wand's recording: the lofty, Klemperer-like disdain for orchestral colour as an end in itself; the bucolic stamp of the Scherzo at, again, an almost identical tempo; the refusal to whip the finale into either a Dionysian frenzy or a Bill of Rights.

What's special about the recording grows from the string section and in particular the violins, led by Jeanne Lamon. All these players are surely well-versed in the language of late-quartet Beethoven. Time and again, exchanging a *battuta* exclamations or deeply engaged in fair-

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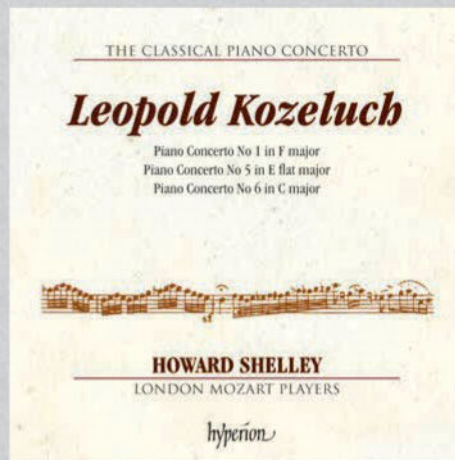


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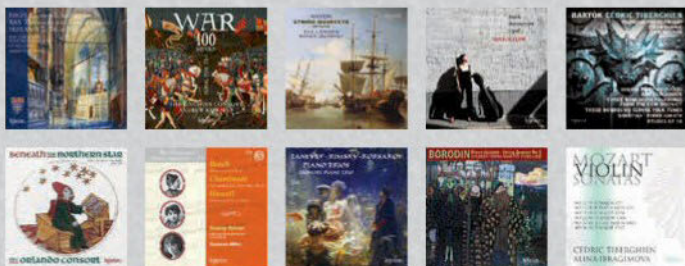
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mindful debate, they reminded me of the inner movements of Op 130. Not so, understandably, the more neutral wind soloists, with the signal, memorably poetic exception of Tafelmusik's first clarinet, Tindaro Capuano, and the slow movement does not rival the heights of a Cavatina played with palpable inner feeling.

The character of the finale's cello recitative is sufficiently strong to absorb the memories of previous movements within its flow, until the full statement of the Joy theme rekindles the strength of purpose which so distinguishes the opening movement. The unsteadiness of the bass injunction suggests an attempt to project into a larger, more conventional performance, and none of the vocal soloists sounds happy in consort.

Weil's defining statement of intent comes with the entry of the Tafelmusik Chamber Choir: all 32 of them, bravely unbuttressed by further support or much help from the microphones, which are more interested in the Turkish percussion. Soft, snarly horns emerge and all manner of felicitous instrumental life wriggles out from the texture as if a boulder had been rolled aside. Schiller's words are not so much lost – the choral voices are professionally blended, their diction excellent – as absorbed within a larger struggle to rejoice against strong odds. A *Choral* Symphony this ain't, but it has a ring of truth. **Peter Quantrill**

Brahms · Liszt

Brahms Piano Concerto No 1, Op 15^a

Liszt Three Funeral Odes, S112

^a**Sándor Falvai** *pf* **Hungarian National**

Philharmonic Orchestra / Zoltán Kocsis

Celestial Harmonies Ⓢ ② 14333-2 (81' • DDD)



Zoltán Kocsis, that 'giant of music' (as Iván Fischer has called him), became Music Director

of the Hungarian National Philharmonic in 1997, 14 years after he and Fischer had co-founded the Budapest Festival Orchestra. On the evidence of their recordings alone, you sense musical soul-mates facing the same direction, never shying away from either risks or interpretative danger. Of the two, Kocsis, tragically lost to us in November at the young age of 64, was perhaps more the maverick musician and this superbly executed Brahms D minor Concerto at times vies with the legendary 1962 live Gould/Bernstein reading for impact.

It is interesting that although at the time Bernstein famously made a great public kerfuffle about Gould's slow tempos, when

he came to record the work with Krystian Zimerman for DG in 1983 his tempo for the *Adagio* was actually slower than in New York by three minutes. True, Sándor Falvai and Kocsis are just a minute swifter than Zimerman and Bernstein in the first movement (although their finale pips Gould and Bernstein to the post by mere seconds), but as comparative tempos are only of the essence to a limited extent, it is better to relate the workings of a performance that is strongly stated, notably unsentimental, transparently drawn in terms of instrumental lines, pianistically forthright (though never insensitive) and with a feeling for symphonic scale that few rival performances can match. As with the two Bernstein-led recordings, having a pianist-composer on the rostrum seems to have added an extra dimension to the interpretation. Above all it breathes a dignified air: I love the strongly projected bass lines and the finale's patiently imperious fugato.

This Brahms Concerto, then, extends our experience of a masterpiece, but Liszt's *Three Funeral Odes*, products of the 1860s and therefore of the composer's late middle-age, are revelatory. The first rises to a fiercely majestic central climax; the second takes its inspiration from a visit to Italy, though paradoxically it also recalls, at times, the world of the *Hungarian Rhapsodies*, whereas the third refers to the tone poem *Tasso*, not only in name but by its use of musical quotation. The performances are both elegiac and boldly defiant and my only regret is that we don't have a recording of the principal Liszt tone poems from Kocsis. Perhaps Hungarian radio can oblige, or Fischer will set to work on a set, maybe as a memorial to his late friend. The present box comes with a generously informative booklet.

Rob Cowan

Bruch

'The Romantic Violin Concerto, Vol 21'

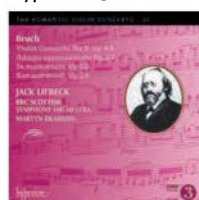
Violin Concerto No 2, Op 44. *Adagio appassionato*, Op 57. *In memoriam*, Op 65.

Konzertstück, Op 84

Jack Liebeck *vn* **BBC Scottish Symphony**

Orchestra / Martyn Brabbins

Hyperion Ⓢ CDA68055 (68' • DDD)



There's much to admire in Jack Liebeck's patrician account of Bruch's

D minor Violin Concerto. His playing is virtually flawless in its technical ease, scintillating articulateness and purity

of tone – very much, in fact, like James Ehnes's dazzling CBC recording. Liebeck is most impressive in the concerto's introspective passages: the plaintive opening, for example, and also in the first movement's coda, where he finds a touching vulnerability. Like Ehnes, though, he's more than a touch too sober. Heifetz, in his benchmark version from 1954 (RCA, 6/56), invested the music with an intensity that made up for any lack of tenderness. Liebeck's restraint is not quite as convincing. Take the way he sails through the finale's lovely, lyrical second theme without relaxing the tempo at all, for instance. Ulf Wallin is a more forceful advocate, and I think this music requires that kind of extra love and care.

Wallin's disc also includes the elegiac, proto-Elgarian *In memoriam* and the odd, two-movement *Konzertstück* (essentially a concerto *sans* finale). Again, I prefer the BIS recording in the former work, but Wallin weighs down the *Konzertstück*, presumably in an attempt to compensate for the lopsided structure. Liebeck's lighter touch can't overcome the fact that the score is unsatisfying – that's Bruch's fault – but his sensitive attention to detail makes it sublimely pleasurable. Listen, for instance, to the ravishing, quiet sincerity of his playing at the beginning of the second movement. Missing from Wallin's disc is the *Adagio appassionato*, a sombre showpiece composed for Joseph Joachim. Liebeck's finespun performance could use more *appassionato* but is affecting in its noble restraint.

Martyn Brabbins is entirely in sync with Liebeck, interpretatively, and elicits lustrous playing from the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra. Certainly, in terms of recorded sound, this Hyperion disc is the best ever lavished on Bruch's unjustly neglected Second Concerto.

Andrew Farach-Colton

Violin Concerto No 2 – selected comparison:

Ehnes, Montreal SO, Bernardi (CBC) SMCD5222

Concerto, In memoriam, Konzertstück – selected comparison:

Wallin, DSO Berlin, Kamu (10/15) (BIS) BIS2069

Bruch

'Complete Works for Violin & Orchestra, Vol 3'

Violin Concerto No 3, Op 58.

Konzertstück, Op 84. *Romanze*, Op 42

Antje Weithaas *vn* **NDR Radio Philharmonic**

Orchestra / Hermann Bäumer

CPO Ⓢ CPO777 847-2 (69' • DDD)



She did great things with Bruch's first two violin concertos. Now Antje Weithaas, in her

determination to complete the set, has turned her attention to the Third. It's rather an anti-climax, given that this rarely heard concerto, for all that Bruch already had two under his belt when he wrote it, doesn't match up to its predecessors, in terms of both depth and tunes. Still, in between the bombastic orchestral accompaniments and the canned melodies – so simple, yet forgettable – the piece boasts moments of real poignancy, particularly when handled as sensitively as this.

Indeed, Weithaas would probably find poetry in the least likely of corners. This satin-toned German solo and chamber violinist, best known in the UK as the leader of the Arcanto Quartet, has a knack of eking out every nuance, resulting in a performance every bit as colourful as Jack Liebeck's 2014 recording. She relishes the muscular punch of the opening movement and the introspection of the second – if anything her interpretation is even more poignant than Liebeck's. She enjoys the moments of sentimentality, without over-egging the pudding. And, most strikingly, she does so with no hint of mannerism or self-regard.

It's an approach that pays dividends in the *Konzertstück*, whose second movement, based on an Irish folk melody, evokes the songful innocence of Bruch's *Scottish Fantasy*. Yet there's no mistaking Weithaas's virtuosity: in her crisp articulation, her pristine intonation and the lightness of touch she brings to the disc's last work, the Op 42 *Romanze*. It is here, in music better described as playful than romantic, that she sounds at her most alive. If only the NDR Radio Philharmonic, under Hermann Bäumer's solid, stolid directorship, could manage to sound equally inspired. **Hannah Nepil**

Violin Concerto No 3 – selected comparison:

Liebeck, BBC Scottish SO, Brabbins (HYPE) CDA68050

Bruckner

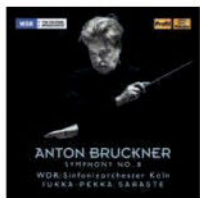
Symphony No 8 (1890 version, ed Haas)

WDR Symphony Orchestra, Cologne /

Jukka-Pekka Saraste

Profil ② PH16061 (75' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Philharmonie, Cologne, November 2-5, 2010



This recording of Bruckner's Eighth Symphony, taped during a live concert in 2010, is distinguished by Jukka-Pekka Saraste's brisk, focused approach and the quality of the WDR Symphony Orchestra's playing. Saraste brings the symphony home

in under 75 minutes compared to the 80-plus-minute performances more regularly heard. This is largely a result of the consistent onward pulse he maintains throughout the symphony rather than the adoption of any particularly fast tempos. Only at the beginning of the finale does Saraste's pacing seem unduly hasty, his tempo of *minim=94* being somewhat at odds with the score's suggested *minim=69* and marking of *Feierlich, nicht schnell* ('solemnly, not fast'). Overall, this is a performance that follows the direct and objective school of Bruckner interpretation exemplified by conductors such as van Beinum and Schuricht, as opposed to the more interventionist styles of Barenboim and Venzago or the more monumental approaches of Giulini and Wand.

The WDR orchestra deliver a richly detailed, burnished sound and splendidly characterised solos, particularly from the woodwinds. The recording captures all but the busiest *tutti*s with clarity and warmth. There's no obvious audience noise, although there is what sounds like a mismatched edit at 7'16" in the *Adagio* and no one seems to have picked up on the fact that the flutes omit two notes at 18'48" in the finale (bar 674 of the Haas score). These details aside, the new recording nicely fills a gap in the market for those who prefer their Bruckner lithe and energetic, although some may feel that an additional quantum of spiritual depth is warranted in this most profound of symphonies. **Christian Hoskins**

Chopin

Piano Concerto No 1, Op 11^a. Four Ballades

Seong-Jin Cho *pf*^a London Symphony

Orchestra / Gianandrea Noseda

DG ② 479 5941 (79' • DDD)



I don't know how many recordings of Chopin's E minor Concerto there are.

The Deutsche Grammophon label alone has nearly 20 available, ranging from Anda, Argerich and Askenase to Wunder, Yundi and Zimerman. Whether or not the considerable merits of this newcomer are enough to win a permanent place alongside its distinguished stablemates only time will tell. It certainly has a lot going for it: the pianist is the winner of the 2015 International Chopin Competition, and the conductor is the newly appointed Principal Guest Conductor of the LSO.

It is Noseda who sets the tone of the performance with an introduction that is full of purpose and not a little swagger. This is no journeyman's accompaniment but, throughout, one which consistently resolves to make Chopin's oft-derided orchestral writing important and telling. As to the young Korean Seong-Jin Cho, whose first studio recording this is (his first for DG, another all-Chopin programme, was of live performances from the Competition finals – 2/16), it is not so much his effortless clarity and articulation or lightly pedalled *fioritura* that capture the attention as much as his ability to let the music breathe. Every time the first movement's ineffably lovely second subject returns, it becomes more poignant in Cho's hands. His phrasing here and in the *Romanza* is truly heart-melting and if the last movement is marginally less special than its predecessors, that hardly counts against this memorable interpretation.

The four Ballades, too, while never in my opinion benefiting from being heard in sequence, have an authority and assurance that compels attention. Are the opening pages of No 1 a tad self-conscious, striving too much for effect? I thought so. But listen to the magical opening of No 2, the deft highlighting of the contrapuntal lines in No 3 (a masterly reading) and the controlled impetuosity of No 4 and you are left in no doubt as to why the jurors in Warsaw voted as they did.

Jeremy Nicholas

Dusapin • Mantovani • Rihm

'21st-Century Violin Concertos'

Dusapin *Aufgang*^a Mantovani *Jeux d'eau*^b

Rihm *Gedicht des Malers*^c

Renaud Capuçon *vn*^a Radio France Philharmonic Orchestra / Myung-Whun Chung; ^bOrchestra of the Opéra National de Paris; ^cVienna Symphony Orchestra / ^{b,c}Philippe Jordan

Erato ② 2564 60268-7 (66' • DDD)

Recorded live at the ^bSalle Pleyel, Paris, February 18, 2012; ^cKonzerthaus, Vienna, January 9 & 10, 2015; ^aPhilharmonie de Paris, January 26, 2015



Our century may be young, but several violin concertos have already staked a claim as major statements in the genre: think Adès, Birtwistle, Salonen and Widmann, to name four.

Do these three efforts, all written for the charismatic Renaud Capuçon and taped at their world premieres, join those? Not quite. That doesn't gainsay Capuçon's probing playing or his welcome



The charismatic Renaud Capuçon plays three 21st-century violin concertos written for him

advocacy, nor the dedication and accuracy of his conductors. But a uniformity of gesture, a too self-conscious reckoning with the concerto format itself, weighs proceedings down.

Dusapin's half-hour concerto comes in three movements and tweaks the old darkness-to-light plot in a dialectical direction. In *Aufgang*, he says, 'the conflict between darkness and dazzlement becomes the driving force'. Clear enough at the outset, with the violin high over a dappled, shadowy background; less so later on, when that conflict meanders, albeit through a particularly forthright, powerful steel-drums-and-flute detour in the second movement.

Rihm's *Gedicht des Malers* ('Poem of the Painter') is his sixth violin concerto, and imagines the soloist as an artist's brush, painting a portrait of Ysaÿe. It packs a remarkable series of moods into its 15 minutes. That's not to say it's a narrative work, although the opening bars suggest a vision, an idea, a sketch coming together. It is sumptuously played, and Rihm gives the soloist space for that, in language that is comfortably aristocratic.

Mantovani's *Jeux d'eau* is a surprisingly violent imaginarium, for the most part


posing a fluid solo line against percussive collisions. It is primarily descriptive, graphic in its depiction of a downward flow, or of how a drop disturbs a surface. No games here, then. Eventually, though, the constant pirouettes, the patter, the plunges wear thin, even in a quarter-hour work. **David Allen**

Dvořák

Symphonic Variations, Op 78 B70.

Slavonic Rhapsodies, Op 45 B86

Prague Philharmonia / Jakub Hrůša

Pentatone (P)  PTC5186 554 (61' • DDD/DSD)



Jakub Hrůša considers himself literally blessed to experience, love and transmit

Dvořák's work. The Czech conductor tells us so himself in his ecstatic booklet-notes, gently nudging us to expect great things of his third Dvořák disc with the Prague Philharmonia. And why wouldn't we? His first two in the series, featuring the Cello Concerto and the overtures, demonstrate a natural flair and passion for his countryman's music. So why does this recording feel comparatively lacklustre?

Possibly because Hrůša, despite his protestations to the contrary, doesn't seem to muster enough enthusiasm for these relative curiosities. And so he doesn't quite manage to elevate Dvořák's rather foursquare melodies in the *Symphonic Variations* or take full advantage of opportunities for contrast. The opening has mystery but not in the way of, say, Kertész's reading with the London Symphony Orchestra. The finale is lively but remains earthbound. What's more frustrating is that both works' key features – their rhythmic vigour and vibrant orchestration – don't get a fair shout.

Not that you can quite blame the performers: the reverberation on the recording bleaches out the orchestral colours and adds to the sense of congestion at the climaxes. But Hrůša doesn't help matters with an approach that, particularly in the *Slavonic Rhapsodies*, prioritises blending over clarity.

More's the pity, because Hrůša has the measure of both works' charm, their geniality, their flow. In both he segues naturally between boisterousness and melancholy yearning. There is a warm glow to his sound, a pride in the music's lyricism that non-Czechs would find hard

to match. And the result does have spirit; it just needs much more. **Hannah Nepil**
Symphonic Variations – selected comparisons:
 LSO, Kertész (11/71^R, 8/87^R) (DECC)
 478 6459DC9 or 483 0744

Englund • Klami

England Violin Concerto Klami Violin Concerto
Benjamin Schmid *vn* **Oulu Symphony Orchestra / Johannes Gustavsson**
 Ondine © ODE1278-2 (57' • DDD)



The Finnish violin concerto after Sibelius: Erkki Melartin's looked like a winner but sank; Aarre Merikanto wrote four but the best of them was never performed in his lifetime. Did the neoclassicists Uuno Klami and Einar Englund fare any better?

Englund's 1981 Concerto can be considered neoclassical in some aspects of design, including its use of an austere pitch motif right from the off. It has some of Prokofiev's menace and phrase shapes that nod to Shostakovich, but there's Romanticism in the tortured slow movement and in the lyricism that counters all the finale's spikes. Not a lost masterpiece but a sturdy work with individual touches.

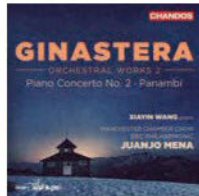
Klami's Concerto, born in 1943 but revised in 1954, has a degree more individuality. Still, don't expect the imposing edifices of Klami's *Kalevala Suite*; the concerto has that work's ruggedness but is otherwise far more changeable, kooky and transparent. The first movement skips through a cavalcade of characterful episodes towards its conclusion and the slow movement has passages of Ariel-like shape-shifting, while the finale surfs waves of freewheeling joy à la Martinů (though some of the cyclic patterning loses its way).

The piece is also lighter in orchestration than Englund's, which suits Benjamin Schmid better. He seems fully engaged with all the notes in both pieces and slips brilliantly from light, vibrato-less playing to tender lyricism. His double-stopping – even at the octave in Klami's slow movement – is impressive. But his attractive, tender sound is also contained. That can be frustrating in the heavier Englund Concerto, especially given his position in the sound picture as a first among equals rather than as a galvanising individual. **Andrew Mellor**

Ginastera

'Orchestral Works, Vol 2'
 Panambi, Op 1^a. Piano Concerto No 2, Op 39^b

^b**Xiayin Wang** *pf* ^a**Ladies of Manchester Chamber Choir; BBC Philharmonic Orchestra / Juanjo Mena**
 Chandos © CHAN10923 (69' • DDD)



Ginastera was still a teenager when he began writing *Panambi* (1934–37). The

concert suite he extracted from the nearly 40-minute ballet score helped establish his reputation, and has since found a place on the fringes of the repertoire. The complete ballet, however, is a rarity. This is, to the best of my knowledge, only its second recording.

Ravel and Stravinsky were obvious influences here, along with Debussy and Bartók (I hear traces of *The Wooden Prince*, too). Yet what's remarkable is how Ginastera already sounds like Ginastera, even when he's pounding out *Rite*-like rhythms or painting sensuous backdrops à la *Daphnis*. Not only that, but there's an irresistible ebb and flow that attests to the sureness of the young Argentinian composer's theatrical instincts.

Gisèle Ben-Dor's pioneering account (originally made for Conifer and reissued by Naxos) is rhythmically tauter and more supplely phrased than this otherwise admirable new version led by Juanjo Mena. I also prefer the richly characterful playing of the LSO to the BBC Philharmonic. On the other hand, Chandos's engineering is spectacular and truly enhances the music's impact.

What makes this new disc particularly valuable, though, is the performance of the Second Piano Concerto (1972). In the self-proclaimed 'neo-expressionist' works of his later years, Ginastera experimented with a variety of modernist compositional techniques – not always convincingly. Here, however, everything works. The thematic material is derived from the dissonant, crunching chord that opens the finale of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, and there's a touching sense throughout the work of glancing back at the past while still looking resolutely ahead.

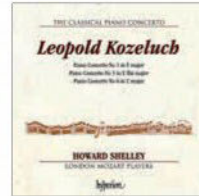
Xiayin Wang is jaw-droppingly impressive. She makes music out of even the most jagged phrases, and the BBC Philharmonic outclass all of the recorded competition in both finesse and commitment. I'd always thought of this work as inferior to the more popular First Concerto; this recording has made me seriously reconsider that opinion.

Andrew Farach-Colton

Panambi – comparative version:
 LSO, Ben-Dor (1/99^R, 2/07) (NAXO) 8 557582

L Kozeluch

'The Classical Piano Concerto, Vol 4'
 Piano Concertos – No 1; No 5; No 6
London Mozart Players / Howard Shelley *pf*
 Hyperion © CDA68154 (76' • DDD)



What if Mozart had never lived? Then perhaps we'd hold the Bohemian

composer Leopold Kozeluch in higher regard. Certainly he was widely admired in his own time, even if Beethoven was a tad dismissive. He arrived in Vienna three years before Mozart whose senior he was by nine years and whom he outlived by 27.

The three concertos presented here by Howard Shelley and the London Mozart Players get the best possible renditions, full of imagination, taking the music as seriously as if it were by Mozart himself. In that regard, they are in a different league from the ones by Tomas Dratva with the Slovak Sinfonietta.

The opening of the First Concerto has a palpable sense of barely contained excitement, even if you wouldn't look to Kozeluch for particularly searching development sections. But charm is to be found at every turn, not least in the spacious *Adagio* of No 1, introduced by strings, the piano then entering with a sinuous melody. It's there in the variation-theme *Andante* of No 5, too, performed with rapt luminosity by Shelley et al. And how Kozeluch loves a good rollicking 6/8 finale, as witness the infectious rondos of his First and Fifth concertos, the latter delightfully underlining the effect by introducing horns for the hunting motif itself. In the opening *Allegro* of the Sixth Concerto, Shelley and the LMP relish the music's sense of purpose, savouring every phrase to full effect. It's impossible to imagine more compelling performances of this music – Howard Shelley is truly a rescuer of lost musical souls. And he and his orchestra enjoy a finely balanced recording, the allure of the disc being completed by typically entertaining and informative notes from Richard Wigmore.

Harriet Smith

Piano Concertos Nos 1 & 5 – selected comparison:
 Slovak Sinfonietta, Dratva (OEHM) OC588

Lalo • Manén

Lalo *Symphonie espagnole, Op 21* **Manén** *Violin Concerto No 1, 'Concierto español', Op A-7*
Tianwa Yang *vn*
Barcelona Symphony Orchestra / Darrell Ang
 Naxos © 8 573067 (63' • DDD)



The Chinese violinist Tianwa Yang, primarily known and acclaimed for her

Naxos discs of Sarasate, struggles here to make much of the *Concierto español* (Concerto No 1) by Joan Manén (1883–1971). Composed in 1898 and revised in 1935, the concerto falls back on familiar Spanish inflections for its colour. Manén, himself a noted virtuoso, does not stint on technical demands, which Yang executes with cool efficiency and incisiveness but without much variety of timbre.

There are, however, moments in the music that promise more in the way of harmonic interest, as if Manén, suddenly under the influence of turn-of-the-century France, had bolted some passages of sultry chromaticism on to a fairly conventional score. Although the central lament is quite beguiling, more could perhaps be made of these potentials for tonal shading by the Barcelona Symphony Orchestra under Darrell Ang and by Yang herself, but in truth it would challenge even the greatest of interpretative minds to make the concerto consistently compelling.

Still, it seems to be the only recording of it currently available, whereas Lalo's *Symphonie espagnole* has dozens of exponents, not least Renaud Capuçon, whose vibrant performance with the Orchestre de Paris under Paavo Järvi came out last year. In this new one Lalo's orchestration sometimes sounds lumpy, but that is largely Lalo's fault and in general Ang coaxes out what finesse it possesses. Yang also finds more inspiration here than in the Manén: if she seldom actually touches the heart, her tone and technique are deftly deployed. **Geoffrey Norris**

Lalo – selected comparisons:

R Capuçon, Orch de Paris, P Järvi

(3/16) (ERAT) 2564 69827-6

Mahler

Symphony No 7

Düsseldorf Symphony Orchestra / Adam Fischer

AVI-Music © AVI8553349 (77' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Tonhalle, Düsseldorf,

November 19–23, 2015



The 'other' Fischer boldly goes where his younger brother has enjoyed such

conspicuous success – and Adam, with his excellent Düsseldorf Symphony, may well be one up on Iván with this compelling account of Mahler's outlandish Seventh.

Let me get my one niggling reservation out of the way. By the close of the first movement I was not entirely convinced. The quality was certainly apparent but the excitement felt muted. There's something truly elemental about this movement, a sense of its having been roughly hewn from the cliff face of Mahler's imagination. For me the temperament which can in an instant convert a good Mahler performance into a great one wasn't apparent. There was beauty in the ineffable second subject (phrased by the Düsseldorf violins in such a way as not to draw attention to its difficulty), especially where it breathed the rarefied air at the heart of the movement. But the impulsiveness of Mahler's rather commonplace *allegro* theme never truly achieved lift-off nor indeed quite the thrill it can and should in the brazen, paganistic coda.

But then the magic did descend. Those inner movements, with their exotic and sometimes wild evocations of the nocturnal world, seemed to unlock something in Fischer and his players. With the echoing horn calls and rustling cow bells of the

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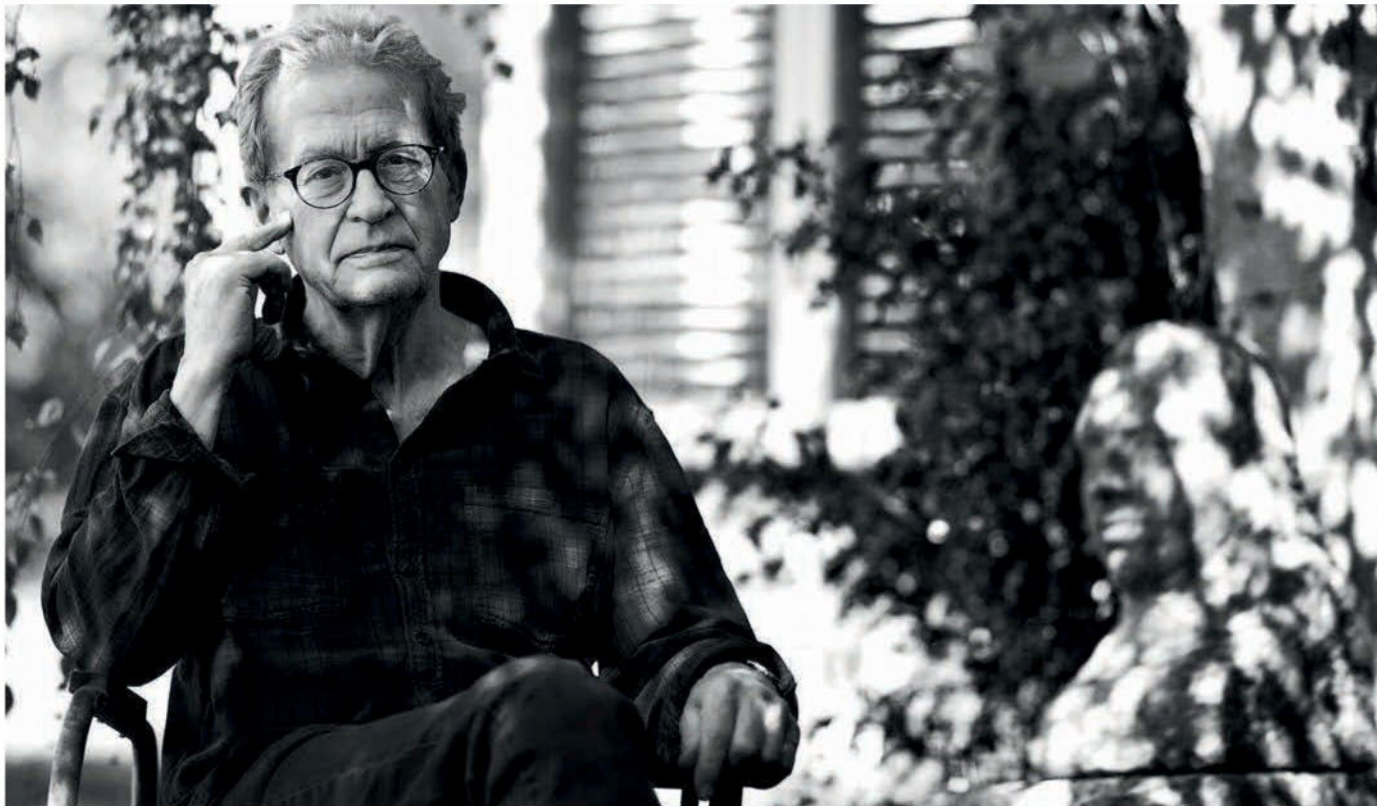
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PELLE GUDMUNDSEN-HOLMGREEN

Liam Cagney explores the music of Denmark's 'puckish outsider', who died last June, on three discs released by long-term supporter Da Capo



Pelle Gudmundsen-Holmgreen (1932-2016)

Last June saw the passing of Pelle Gudmundsen-Holmgreen, Denmark's puckish musical outsider. By coincidence Da Capo, a long-term supporter of Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's, had scheduled the release for that month of three new discs of his music. These, alongside the success of Hans Abrahamsen's *let me tell you* (Abrahamsen was Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's student), offer us a good opportunity to revisit Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's *oeuvre*.

Gudmundsen-Holmgreen had a familiar stylistic development. Initially influenced by Bartók and Nielsen, he then spent a few years in thrall to serialism before, in the mid-1960s, shifting to a stripped-down, tonally inflected musical language, in line with what came to be known as the New Simplicity. That tag, however, doesn't at all do justice to Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's eccentric music, which is deceptively hard to pin down.

On the surface it seems familiar. Sure, there's the repetition of brief tonal cells;

musical quotations (familiar figures from Stravinsky, Sibelius, Mozart); modality; dashes of Nordic colour; quirky instrumentation; simple metre; Stravinskian objectivity; and, overhanging it all, a wry air by which Gudmundsen-Holmgreen makes clear he doesn't take himself too seriously. But for me there's something else going on here: at its best his music uses those features only to pass through them into a more mysterious, anonymous zone.

Take *Incontri* (2010-12), for example, from **Incontri: Works for Orchestra**. An opening jocular clarinet motif is abruptly framed against the martial air of snare and timpani rolls and trombone swells. Then some Varèsean chords appear; then an energetic major-third motif on the violins. These disparate elements periodically recur without ever seeming to meet, and when the music is up and running it's fascinating to hear the elements slip by each other. The poet Patrick Kavanagh, talking about that wonderment of childhood dispelled by adult life,

wrote: 'Through a chink too wide there comes in no wonder.' In Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's music, wonderment shines in the thin chinks separating the contrasting musical elements.

The other two works on the orchestral disc show Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's impish side. *Mirror II* (1973) opens with a beautifully restrained wash of colour, equal parts Sibelius and Ligeti, before obliquely launching into several movements of Stravinskian metrics. In *Symphony-Antiphony* (1977), the Symphony lasts all of two and a half minutes; the Antiphony goes on for 26.

Two of Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's longstanding collaborators were Copenhagen's Theatre of Voices and San Francisco's Kronos Quartet, and they feature together on **Green Ground**. This work of 2011 highlights Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's constructivism and its kinship with Renaissance and Baroque techniques such as ground bass. So first we get *No Ground*, Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's Eleventh String Quartet, an airy mix of atonality and open-string fifths; then the

choral work *Green*, whose austere vocals recall Dowland and are accompanied by crotales and woodblocks; finally there's *No Ground Green*, in which – why not? – the two preceding works are simply laid on top of one another in palimpsest fashion and performed simultaneously. The two other works on the disc, *New Ground* and *New Ground Green* follow a similar strategy, one that suggests the word-shuffling of Samuel Beckett.

Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's Beckett affinity is most apparent on **Repriser: Works for Sinfonietta and Small Ensemble**. Three of the works here are from the 1960s, when the composer was under Beckett's spell. This disc is the darkest in hue; it is also the best of the three. In *Repriser* (1965), an ambience of the absurd is conjured by spare wind and brass ejaculations, sporadic tubular bells, pitch bends and quarter-tones. *Rerepriser* (1967) injects some heavy metal riffs into the proceedings, played by electric guitar doubling harpsichord (of course). Parts of *Traffic* (1994), on the other hand, are so ridiculously corny it's hard not to laugh out loud: opening with the cacophony of a traffic jam, the work then subsides and at one point there's what sounds like a slap bass solo in the middle of a Dixieland jazz session. *The Three Songs to Texts by Politiken* (1966) for solo voice and ensemble, in a manner reminiscent of (but pre-dating) Gerald Barry, set brief articles, seemingly chosen at random, from the titular Danish broadsheet newspaper; the topics cover dramatic items like the Danish government's debating of a finance bill.

The one aspect of Gudmundsen-Holmgreen's style that leaves me cold is his occasional postmodern penchant for musical quotations. But there is much else here to make him a composer worth spending time with (the discs also feature fine booklet-notes by Andrew Mellor of this parish). With an increasing number of advocates among conductors and ensembles, Gudmundsen-Holmgreen is a composer whose reputation will continue to rise. **G**

THE RECORDINGS



Gudmundsen-Holmgreen *Incontri*
BBC SO / Thomas Dausgaard
Dacapo Ⓢ 8 226120



Gudmundsen-Holmgreen
Green Ground Kronos Qt; Th of Voices
Dacapo Ⓢ 8 226153



Gudmundsen-Holmgreen *Repriser*
Athelas Sinfonietta Copenhagen
Dacapo Ⓢ 8 226126

second movement came an intensification of atmosphere, the playing both here and in the intoxicating guitar- and mandolin-flecked fourth movement beautifully nuanced. I loved, too, the razor-sharp pointing of things going bump in the night throughout the Scherzo – the slithery glissandos, grunting bassoons and spook-house shrieks.

But best of all – and this might be the most successful account that I have ever heard of it – is Fischer's chronicling of Mahler's bonkers finale. Yes, we get that it's an apotheosis of the dance, a celebration of the musics that make us dance, but it's the way that Fischer manages the movement's insane transitions, spiriting us to and from each 'divertissement' with such wit and charm, that makes something almost rational of its barely concealed anarchy. The 'expansive' moment in the coda where the whole piece finally swells with pride is absolutely tremendous. If only the first movement had delivered like that we'd be looking at even more of a front-runner. Fischer minor, watch out. **Edward Seckerson**

Mozart

Piano Concertos – No 1, K37;
No 2, K39; No 3, K40; No 4, K41

Ronald Brautigam *fp*

Cologne Academy / Michael Alexander Willens
BIS Ⓢ BIS2094 (59' • DDD/DSD)



We reach the end of Brautigam's Mozart concerto cycle with the four 'early' works.

These were long assumed to be examples of the 11-year-old's prodigious gifts, before research in the last century showed the facts to be slightly more prosaic: that these were in fact largely reworkings of sonata movements by contemporary German composers.

You may be thinking: juvenile Mozart? So what? That this is more than a curiosity is down to the performances – the period-instrument Cologne Academy under Michael Alexander Willens are ardent, immediate and receptive to Brautigam's every move. And that every move is delivered via a wonderfully characterful McNulty fortepiano adds considerably to the experience, which is beautifully captured by BIS's engineers.

Wisely, the disc opens with the Third Concerto, arguably the most striking piece here; even the passagework is given with great colour, while Brautigam relishes the little harmonic twists in the slow movement

and brings alive Mozart's ornamentation with the requisite delicacy. The finale (based on CPE Bach's *La boebmer*) is thrilling, an irresistible chase in which the horns are superbly forward.

The performers make the best case for the somewhat less characterful First Concerto (whose second movement is the only original piece, by Mozart father and son), the élan of the orchestral playing adding greatly to its memorability. The dotted theme that dominates the first movement of No 2, K39, has a rather swaggering demeanour here and the lower end of the McNulty's range is heard to good effect; there are more instances of vibrant bass textures in the opening movement of No 4, which also has a touching slow movement in the minor.

Those wedded to Brautigam's Mozart cycle will need no encouragement from me, but such is the communicativeness of the playing on this disc that its appeal reaches well beyond that. **Harriet Smith**

Mozart • Nielsen

Mozart Flute Concerto No 1, K313. Adagio, K315.

Rondo, K373 **Nielsen** Flute Concerto

Juliette Bausor *fl*

Royal Northern Sinfonia / Jaime Martin

Signum Ⓢ SIGCD467 (56' • DDD)



When it comes to recordings of Mozart's First Flute Concerto the choices of partner

works are rarely of an originality to get anyone's pulse racing. A dead cert is usually the Flute and Harp Concerto, as is his *Andante* in C major. Then, having run out of Mozart repertoire written specifically for the flute, it's usually over to the spuriously named Flute Concerto No 2 that's really an arrangement of the Oboe Concerto, and the Rondo in D major that started life as a work for violin soloist.

These determinedly all-Mozart programmes make for undeniably pleasant listening but there's also a faintly depressing sense of resignation about them: 'Folks, we weren't exactly drowning in options here', etc. As a result, the fact that Juliette Bausor (Ensemble 360, and the London Philharmonic Orchestra's Principal Flute) has thought as far outside the box for a partner work as Nielsen's Flute Concerto of 1926 makes her recording instantly attention-worthy, and she and the Royal Northern Sinfonia have then cemented it with some very enjoyable performances.

The Mozart concerto comes first, played with absolute conviction. We still get the

seemingly obligatory *Andante* in C and Rondo in D before we reach the Nielsen, which turns out to be a perfect foil to the Mozart's warm, elegant exuberance. This later work allows the orchestra to display their harder edge but also at times to draw out unexpectedly Mozartian parallels, with Bausor herself commanding the performance with her range of colours and liquid virtuosity.

To be picky, it seems a shame not to have added still further to the adventurous coupling by looking beyond Mozart for the mid-programme fillers, but this is still an immensely refreshing offering.

Charlotte Gardner

Rasmussen

Symphony No 2, 'The Earth Anew'

Cyndia Sieden *sop* Bo Skovhus *bar* Academic Male

Voice Choir of Helsinki; Merry Musicians Male

Voice Choir; Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra /

John Storgårds

Dacapo © 8 226175 (53' • DDD • T/t)



We've waited a long time for the successor to Sunleif Rasmussen's First Symphony,

Oceanic Days (1997). John Storgårds eventually lost patience and commissioned a second symphony from the Faroese composer himself, with help from the Helsinki Philharmonic and a consortium of foundations. The piece was first performed in 2015 in Helsinki in a concert that included Sibelius's *Kullervo*.

There are clear parallels with the earlier work, not only in terms of scoring but also in the narrative recounting of an old Nordic (in this case, Norse) myth. But the story of the tree of life Yggdrasil reminds us too of Wagner's borrowing of the tale for *The Ring's* World-Ash Tree. In the final movement of Rasmussen's symphony the sun turns black and the land sinks into the sea; the rebirth that follows feels much like that which comes after Brunnhilde's immolation.

Indeed, Rasmussen's new symphony is a bold, imposing piece that leaves multiple residues in its wake. The music feels every bit as though it's been simmering inside the composer for the two decades since its predecessor. Some of that work's techniques, notably its smooth weave and pointillist tendencies, are taken forwards here. The presence of Faroese folk songs is consciously more foregrounded but the general feel is more tectonic and primordial.

The rhythmic impulse is compelling, best heard in the *agitato* first movement,

which feels pulled up from deep inside the earth, and in the capering Scherzo: a joyous but rooted depiction of the tree's messenger squirrel (Cyndia Sieden sounding every bit rodentine). Rasmussen's scoring is outrageously imaginative here and, in fact, everywhere; his huge, writhing and wriggling orchestral depths are often topped out by frantic, glistening high winds. The whole is peppered with ear-catching instrumental effects that the Helsinki players take in their stride, as if they rehearsed for two weeks solid (they probably did). Bo Skovhus is warm of voice but tears into his baritone solos; Sieden is clear as a bell; and the choirs sing with grain and weight. New music of a very, very high quality in a thrilling performance – and we have Storgårds to thank for both. Andrew Mellor

Schreker

Der Schatzgräber – Symphonic Interlude.

Die Gezeichneten – Prelude. Das Spielwerk – Prelude. Vorspiel zu einer grossen Oper.

Der ferne Klang – Nachtstück

Royal Swedish Orchestra / Lawrence Renes

BIS © BIS2212 (69' • DDD/DSD)



Luxuriously orchestrated and sensuously intoxicating, the

extended orchestral interludes found in Schreker's operas are as fine an introduction as any to the music of this historically important but still under-performed Austrian composer. Premiered in Vienna in 1909, the *Nachtstück* from Schreker's second opera, *Der ferne Klang*, is probably the best-known piece here. Its quixotic, surging nature is typical of the composer's mature style, the music frequently building to ecstatic climaxes which alternate with softer episodes populated by sinuous instrumental solos and gentle percussive splashes from the likes of tambourine, celesta and harp. The preludes from *Das Spielwerk* and *Die Gezeichneten* as well as the *Symphonisches Zwischenspiel* from *Der Schatzgräber*, the latter opera representing the peak of Schreker's box-office success, follow a similar formula. By contrast, the *Vorspiel zu einer grossen Oper*, composed in 1933 and his last completed work, finds Schreker's music taking a different direction. Based on sketches from his unfinished opera *Memnon*, this piece reflects the leaner scoring of Schreker's later operas *Christophorus* and *Der Schmied von Gent* as well as featuring an attractive air of orientalism.

Lawrence Renes directs idiomatic and vivid performances of all the pieces on this disc and enjoys superbly detailed and committed playing from the Royal Swedish Orchestra (the orchestra of the Royal Swedish Opera). Until now, the highly charged and superbly engineered recordings by Vassily Sinaisky and the BBC Philharmonic on Chandos have been my preferred versions of these works. However, Renes's performances are equally desirable and the BIS recording even more luminous and transparent. Recommended with enthusiasm.

Christian Hoskins

Zwischenspiel, Ferne Klang, Nachtstück – selected comparison:

BBC PO, Sinaisky (6/00) (CHAN) CHAN9797

Vorspiel, Spielwerk Prelude – selected comparison:

BBC PO, Sinaisky (1/02) (CHAN) CHAN9951

Searle

Symphonies – No 3, Op 36^a; No 5, Op 43^b.

Labyrinth, Op 56^c; Zodiac Variations, Op 53^d

^aBBC Symphony Orchestra / John Pritchard;

^cCity of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra /

Louis Frémaux; ^bHallé Orchestra /

Lawrence Leonard; ^dOrchestra Nova

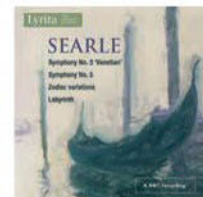
of London / Lawrence Foster

Lyrita Itter Broadcast Collection mono

© REAM1130 (73' • ADD)

Broadcast performances: ^bMarch 12, 1966;

^dJuly 7, 1970; ^aJuly 12, 1971; ^cNovember 23, 1971

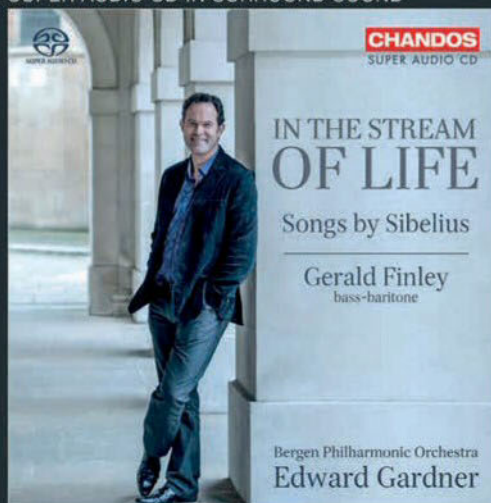


If you want to hear a late-20th-century equivalent of 'The Scream' as suggested

in the first movement of Mahler's Tenth Symphony, listen to from around 9'12" into Humphrey Searle's *Labyrinth* for orchestra (1971) on this revelatory CD, a passage that rivals Friedrich Cerha in its cluster-like intensity. A rondo of sorts with no specific programme save for a nod in the direction of classical legend, its materials are, according to Searle himself, 'at once dense, impenetrable, translucent and illusory'.

This 'total maze' is conveyed on the wings of some magnificent orchestration, the musical language unforgivingly atonal though the tone poetry achieved is extremely imposing. This is Searle's way, using the 12-note system as a means rather than an end, much as Nikolaus Harnoncourt used old instruments, not out of historical 'principle' but because Bach, or should I say 'his' Bach, sounded better when played on them. Searle, a Webern pupil who recalled his master lecturing him on a C major chord, absorbed elements of pointillist compositional style, which

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Disc of the Month

Sibelius: In the Stream of Life

premiere recordings

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CHSA 5178

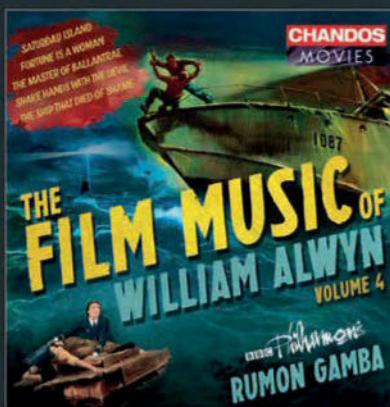


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Explore the fraught world of late Schubert with the Doric's second volume of mature quartets. They will perform the programme alongside quartets by Haydn, subject of another highly praised Chandos series, in international venues, from New York's Carnegie Hall to Berlin's Konzerthaus, Amsterdam's Concertgebouw, and London's Wigmore Hall.

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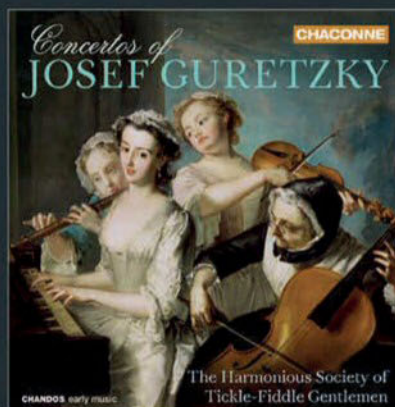


The Film Music of William Alwyn, Vol. 4

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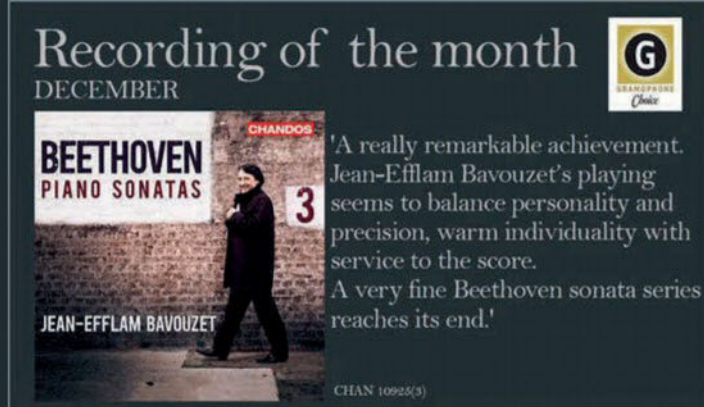
Concertos of Josef Guretzky

premiere recordings

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The baroque ensemble here commits to record neglected concertos by Guretzky, rich in Italian-influenced virtuosity and dynamism. The album features the premiere recording of four of his nine cello concertos as well as his only surviving Violin Concerto.

CHAN 0816



Recording of the month DECEMBER



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informs his Fifth Symphony (1964), maintaining these even when a strain of violence shifts the music very much into its own realm.

You might have expected the mono sound to cramp the music's style, but it doesn't. In fact these BBC Radio 3 mono broadcasts are extremely well balanced, the dense opening of the Third Symphony (1960) sounding especially vivid. Searle habitually gave his percussion a major role, the big drums especially, and the recording engineers need to ensure that they're kept in a true perspective, which they are here. The *Zodiac Variations* (1970) take us through the star signs in four groups of three, with music to match, some of it fairly disruptive.

Performance values are high, the works entrusted to the BBC SO under John Pritchard (Symphony No 3) and the Hallé under Lawrence Leonard (No 5), the Orchestra Nova of London under Lawrence Foster (*Zodiac Variations*) and the CBSO under Louis Frémaux (*Labyrinth*). All acquit themselves with great skill and, with Searle's birth centenary just passed (he was born in 1915), I reckon it's time to look at this material afresh. Good as these productions are, and they are good, these powerhouse works are tailor-made for the digital age and deserve up-to-date reportage. Excellent booklet-notes by Paul Conway. **Rob Cowan**

Shostakovich

Piano Concertos – No 1, Op 35^a; No 2, Op 102^b.

String Quartets (arr Giltburg): No 2, Op 68 – Waltz; No 8, Op 110

Boris Giltburg *pf* ^a**Rhys Owens** *tpt*

^{ab}**Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra /**

Vasily Petrenko

Naxos ® 8 573666 (70' • DDD)



If you have your doubts about the various scored-up versions of

Shostakovich's string quartets for chamber orchestra, then Boris Giltburg's solo arrangements will likely raise the eyebrows even higher. But let's not be hasty. The Waltz from the Second String Quartet is of necessity on the steady side, with rubato inflections that no string ensemble could achieve (or would probably want to). Yet such is the persuasiveness of the playing that the essential drama of the piece – its single-mindedness balanced against a mounting sense of alarm – certainly comes across. The Eighth Quartet is an odder choice, however. While the fast second and third movements lose little,

and arguably even gain something in impact from the percussiveness of the piano's attack, in slower passages Shostakovich's sustained pedal-points pose unsolvable problems. Even here, Giltburg's tact, skill and passion give an impression of how the composer might have introduced the work to his circle of friends. On the downside, some moments of rhetorical over-emphasis are more off-putting than convincing. The pianist's own booklet-essay puts his case persuasively, sharing his responses to all the music on the disc candidly but without embarrassment.

Giltburg has all the agility, power and expressive intensity Shostakovich's piano concertos demand, plus the temperament to negotiate their mercurial shifts of mood. Every phrase is imaginatively coloured or nuanced, and never out of gimmicky point-making, always because he has something worth saying. And he has found like-minded partners in the RLPO and Petrenko, who not only follow and support him superbly but also respond and provoke where appropriate. The orchestra's Principal Trumpet, Rhys Owen, is rock-steady in the First Concerto's tricky low-lying *cantabile*, which is as much a feature of the part as its perky high-register interventions.

Overall, then, these are recordings to set alongside those of Melnikov and Currentzis as unusually productive creative collaborations. Naturally there are many differences. Melnikov is even more daring in the slow movement of the Second Concerto, for instance. And in the finale of the First, Giltburg opts for rhetorical pulling-back in order to maintain clarity and weight, rather than steaming through hell-for-leather as the composer's recordings (and his score) suggest; either approach is defensible, though I'm bound to say I prefer the latter. Giltburg offers fully projected, concert-hall-style accounts, with all the richness of pedal and no-holds-barred attack that would suggest. Given that the piano is already close-miked and quite forwardly balanced, that can occasionally make the sound a touch overbearing. Even so, I can't imagine anyone taking great exception, especially given the Naxos price tag and the curiosity value of the arrangements. **David Fanning**

Concertos – selected comparison:

Melnikov, Mahler CO, Currentzis (HARM) HMC902104

See *The Musician and the Score* on page 40

Shostakovich

Cello Concerto No 1, Op 107^a.

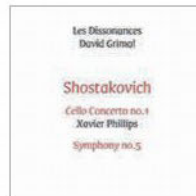
Symphony No 5, Op 47^b

^a**Xavier Phillips** *vc* **Les Dissonances / David Grimal**

Dissonances Records © LD009 (78' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Opéra de Dijon,

^aDecember 2, 2014; ^bJanuary 23, 2016



When it comes to the First Cello Concerto, the most obvious recent point of

comparison is Alisa Weilerstein with the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra under Pablo Heras-Casado. Both Weilerstein and Xavier Phillips studied the piece with Rostropovich and you hear rather more stylistic echoes in his performance than you do in hers, though the playing of Les Dissonances ('the meeting of disparate worlds') under their Artistic Director David Grimal lacks the vivid inflections and dynamic hairpins that characterise Heras-Casado's approach, even within the first minute. The *Moderato* second movement benefits from this level of restraint; but, good though the cadenza is, it doesn't light up the sky quite as vividly as Weilerstein's high-octane delivery does, like a burning bridge to the gruelling finale. At times Phillips and Grimal verge on sounding polite, and although their production is trim and well ordered, something of the music's innate sense of protest has been lost.

As to the Fifth Symphony, the very opening doesn't augur especially well: a gentle attack and violins that are perilously close to sounding 'period' – quiet, pale and, initially, with no vibrato, though that's not for the duration. Gergiev and his Mariinsky forces are more impressive, and don't even think of using Kondrashin, Haitink or Mravinsky as comparisons. No contest there I'm afraid. The movement's dramatic centre (from 7'40") sounds like chamber music writ large, though as with the concerto what's lacking is a sense of urgency, of desperation, as if the music is obliged to bow to the very tyranny it's trying to escape. The *Allegretto* is very good, nevertheless, and the *Largo*'s purity will have some takers, although I'm not one of them: I much prefer a more impassioned approach. This overall lack of bombast works best in the finale, which offers more food for thought than usual, the central section especially.

So, an interesting – and often transparent – approach to both the symphony and the concerto, well worth sampling, certainly if you normally find Shostakovich's bigger-scale music excessively dark or overbearing. But for me there are just too many compromises along the way, and Shostakovich is never about

compromise. Presentation, annotation and sound are all excellent. **Rob Cowan**

Cello Concerto No 1 – selected comparison:

Weilerstein, Bavarian RSO, Heras-Casado

(10/16) (DECC) 483 0835DH

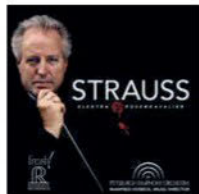
Symphony No 5 – selected comparison:

Mariinsky Orch, Gergiev (9/14) (MARI) MAR0545

R Strauss

Elektra – Suite (arr Honeck/Ille). Der Rosenkavalier – Suite (arr Rodziński)
Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra / Manfred Honeck

Reference Recordings © FR722SACD
 (59' • DDD/DSD)



Given that the orchestra could be described as one of the key characters in

Strauss's *Elektra*, it is surprising that nobody before Manfred Honeck has made a suite of music from the opera. In collaboration with the Czech composer Tomáš Ille, he has created a 33-minute suite performed with tremendous élan by the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra. Honeck employs opulent forces, but scaled down from the 110 musicians Strauss demands in the pit.

The recording packs a mighty punch from the initial Agamemnon motif, scything brass braying Elektra's revenge theme. There is percussive glitter for Klytemnestra, whip cracks marking the arrival of her entourage. The full barbarism of Strauss's score makes a searing impact, Orest's murder of Klytemnestra especially brutal, yet there are moments of great tenderness too. Reference Recordings affords the Pittsburgh Symphony a weighty sound, strong in bass attack. Honeck provides his own excellent booklet-notes which give the listener a blow-by-blow account of the music, with helpful timings.

After a polite pause, horns whoop their libidinous joy to launch another Strauss suite. *Der Rosenkavalier*, given here in Artur Rodziński's 1944 arrangement, offers a high-calorie feast after the visceral drama of *Elektra*. Composed only two years apart, the operas occupy very difficult musical worlds. Honeck, who'd have played this many times in the Wiener Staatsoper pit, teases the waltz rhythms with halting rubatos. Baron Ochs's waltz steals in on the softest, most hesitant of strings, returning with great bluster to conclude the disc. A splendid showcase for Honeck's Pittsburgh forces. **Mark Pullinger**

Tchaikovsky

Piano Concerto No 1, Op 23^a

Nutcracker Suite, Op 71a (arr Pletnev)

Alexandra Dariescu *pf*

^a**Royal Philharmonic Orchestra / Darrell Ang**

Signum © SIGCD441 (53' • DDD)



Alexandra Dariescu has been garnering accolades for the past 10 years or so, and

from this debut concerto disc I can well see why. The young Romanian gives a consummately musical account of the most frequently ridden of concerto warhorses; not for a moment did I resent the time spent hearing and rehearing it.

She has no need of gimmicks to make her mark, such is her rounded musicianship and maturity of temperament. Anything that might strike one as slightly unusual, such as her delicacy in the transition between the long first-movement introduction and the official first subject, is just down to her fastidious attention to the score. Not that she makes a fetish of that sort of thing – tempo joins, for instance, are made with the traditional easings up or down, whether or not the text sanctions

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Alban Gerhardt © Kaupo Kikkas

them. Dariescu has plenty of power and agility too, but again she deploys them strictly for the sake of the music rather than for her own glory. Above all she knows how to shape lines by means of tactical withdrawal of lighter elements in a phrase, rather than Rambo-style forcing of the heavier ones. The slow movement sings and dances with a nice blend of fantasy and control, and the finale is never overheated or overdriven, always on a human rather than super-human scale – in short, richly satisfying.

At the start it seems that the RPO sound is somewhat strings-light and brass-heavy, and the first-movement coda shows the same limitation. However, there is also much finesse in the playing, and my ears soon adjusted.

Mikhail Pletnev's arrangement of the *Nutcracker Suite* is a more than welcome filler, and it too is delivered with abundant quasi-orchestral imagination. True, Pletnev himself brought an extra degree of panache to his own 1978 recording, driving with sovereign unconcern through places where Dariescu quite understandably has to make a few concessions to tempo.

Probably she would risk a touch more abandon if these were live encores. Still, overall this is a more than impressive calling card for an artist who looks set for a fine career. **David Fanning**

Nutcracker Suite – selected comparison:

Pletnev (MELO/BMG) 74321 25181-2

Tchaikovsky • Stravinsky

Stravinsky The Fairy's Kiss – Divertimento

Tchaikovsky The Nutcracker, Op 71^a

^aBoys of Cologne Cathedral Choir; Gürzenich

Orchestra, Cologne / Dmitri Kitaenko

Oehms Ⓢ ② OC448 (123' • DDD)



The physical presentation of this Oehms Classics release in a standard slim

jewel case isn't going to win any prizes. Sir Simon Rattle's Christmas gift for 2010 came in a multiplicity of formats, one a limited edition hardback book running to 50-odd pages, while Valery Gergiev's swift and punchy first recording was squeezed on to a deftly presented single disc by eliminating pauses between numbers. Perhaps design, economy and annotation matter less in these days of streaming. And sonically at least the German label has come up trumps. The unusually present, detailed sound adds greatly to the lustre of what is an old-fashioned studio recording with no audience noises to mask

The variably transliterated Dmitri Kitaenko (or Dmitriy Kitajenko, as Oehms has it), the only *Nutcracker* conductor to have set down the ballet's lesser-known companion piece, the opera *Iolanta* (Oehms, 10/15), alongside all eight [sic] Tchaikovsky symphonies, finds charm and breadth of utterance in everything he touches. That said, he has never been a speed merchant and his relaxed approach to *The Nutcracker* presents quite a contrast to the high-profile digital contenders mentioned above. Not necessarily a bad thing if you find Rattle overly precious and Gergiev merely brusque. Sample the famous March (track 3): my guess is you'll know straight away if Kitaenko is too slow for you. His Snowflakes waltz a little stolidly too. While scarcely any meaningful story survives the ballet's voyage from the mimed semi-reality of an idealised family Christmas to the land of eternal sweetmeats (and virtuoso dancing), Act 1 retains a certain dramatic impulse even in slow-mo. Yes, the solos lack the personality of Rattle's Berliners and the sheer heft of Gergiev's home team, in 1998 still known by its Soviet-era Kirov tag, but there's much to be said for Kitaenko's unforced naturalness and affection for the music.

Stravinsky planned the *The Fairy's Kiss* as a conscious Tchaikovskian homage, so this coupling has a certain logic; nevertheless, it is Rattle rather than Kitaenko who points up the forward-looking, *Petrushka*-ish elements in the older ballet. But why not include *The Fairy's Kiss* in its entirety? The *Divertimento* is relatively ubiquitous on disc and, again, some listeners will miss an edgier, more driven style of interpretation. Still, this reading is very beautiful in its way, with everything properly prepared and textures at once crystalline and sumptuous.

David Gutman

Tchaikovsky – selected comparisons:

Kirov Orch, Gergiev (1/99) (PHIL) 462 114-2PH

BPO, Rattle (12/10) (EMI) 631621-2

Vivaldi

Rousseau Le printemps de Vivaldi (transcr of 'Spring', RV269) **Vivaldi** Concertos – 'La tempesta di mare', RV433; 'La notte', RV439; RV441; RV443; RV532 – Andante. Nisi Dominus, RV608 – Cum dederit. Il Giustino – Vedrò con mio diletto

Lucie Horsch recs **Amsterdam Vivaldi Players**

Decca Ⓢ 483 0896DH (53' • DDD)



It was big news earlier this year when Decca Classics signed Dutch teenager Lucie Horsch

as its first-ever recorder player. So here now is her debut album, and perhaps rather predictably there's an element of Ladybird Guide to the overall package, Decca clearly pitching to those who are as new to the recorder as they are themselves. Visuals-wise, this means images of 16-year-old Horsch looking appropriately fresh and wholesome – on a bicycle, perched next to an Amsterdam canal and so on – with booklet-notes outlining her 'Vivaldi's Girl' credentials. Then, the programme itself features all four main solo recorder sizes (sopranino, descant, treble, tenor), opening with the most famous Vivaldi recorder concerto of all, RV443.

Horsch herself is very good, displaying a phenomenal technique right from RV443's virtuoso opening movement; articulation is never short of immaculate and her control across the dynamic range is equally secure. Another plus is the programme's variety. Non-concerto highlights include a joyous solo sopranino performance of 'Spring' from *The Four Seasons* (Jean-Jacques Rousseau's arrangement) and an appropriately dark tenor transcription of the *Nisi Dominus* aria 'Cum dederit'.

It does feel, however, as if Horsch is concentrating more on getting things perfect than on making statements. For instance, she eschews the go-wild ornamentation possibilities of RV443's slow (although not so slow here) Siciliana movement, and in general her readings feel safe rather than adventurous in terms of articulation style and plays with metre; I'd have enjoyed more made of certain cadences, in particular. She also sticks to one recorder per work.

This probably isn't one for die-hard recorder listeners, but it's a strong start to a recording career.

Charlotte Gardner

Weinberg

Symphony No 17, 'Memory', Op 137. Suite

Siberian State Symphony Orchestra, Krasnoyarsk

/ **Vladimir Lande**

Naxos Ⓢ 8 573565 (65' • DDD)



The last years of Stalin's rule were touch-and-go for all Soviet creative artists,

fearful as they were of a re-run of the vicious anti-formalist tribulations. For the Jewish intelligentsia there was the added tension of the anti-cosmopolitan campaign, which had been anticipated in January 1948 by the murder of Weinberg's father-in-law, the great actor Solomon Mikhoels.

Weinberg himself was tailed by the secret police during these years, until his eventual arrest and incarceration – thankfully short-lived – in February 1953. The music he composed in these years was of necessity mainly of a below-the-parapet, potboiler timidity: tuneful, folk-like and inoffensive.

All the same, the orchestral Suite of 1950 manages to exude a pale, winsome charm. Each of its five movements is catchy in a Light Programme way (which is to say a good deal more than merely competent). Weinberg's background as a Warsaw theatre and café pianist evidently came in handy here, as it did in his music for circus orchestras at the same time and in his film scores for many years to come. The Waltz is a dead-ringer for its opposite numbers in Shostakovich's ballets and suites, perhaps because of shared roots in Tchaikovsky. Likewise the Polka's passing resemblance to his friend and mentor's wartime song 'Macpherson before his Execution' is intriguing but may well be no more than coincidental. Whatever the case, the Suite certainly merits its first recording and the care that Vladimir Lande and his Siberian orchestra have lavished on it.

They have more to get their teeth into with the Symphony No 17, the first of the 'War Trilogy' Weinberg composed between 1982 and 1984 and whose overall title *On the Threshold of War* refers back to the motto of his second opera, *The Madonna and the Soldier*. There is nothing remotely opportunistic or sentimental about the style here. Rather the prevailing austerity – a throwback to the Requiem of 1967, whose themes and textures are also echoed – demands unremitting concentration from listener and orchestra alike. This the Siberians undoubtedly supply, and although ideally they could do with a larger string section and more refined wind and brass, Lande finds more momentum and urgency than does Fedoseyev in either of his recordings, as well as more bleakness and biting militancy – in short, more emotional truthfulness. All in all this ranks as one of the finest in Naxos's admirable contributions to Weinberg's recorded symphonic *oeuvre*.

David Fanning

Symphony No 17 – comparative versions:

USSR RSO, Fedoseyev (2/97) (OLYM) OCD590

Vienna SO, Fedoseyev (5/12) (NEOS) NEOS11126

Leo Borchard

'The Telefunken Recordings 1933-35'

Boccherini String Quintet, G275 – Minuet

Delibes Coppelia – Valse lente; Mazurka. Sylvia – Intermezzo (Act 1); Valse lente **Grieg** Peer Gynt:

Suite No 1, Op 46 – Morning; The Death of Åse; Anitra's Dance; Suite No 2, Op 55 – Solveig's Song **Haydn** Symphony No 88 – Finale

Mendelssohn Fantaisie, Op 16 No 2

(arr Andreae) **Suppé** Banditenstreich –

Overture **Tchaikovsky** The Nutcracker: Suite, Op 71a – Overture miniature; March; Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy; Russian Dance; Arabian Dance; Chinese Dance; Dance of the Reed Flutes. Sleeping Beauty, Op 66 – Valse (Act 1)

Wagner Die Walküre – Wotan's Farewell^a

^aHans Reinmar bar

Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra / Leo Borchard
Testament mono © SBT1514 (74' • ADD)



It's all about timing. Eighteen months after the Berliner Philharmoniker

elected the second Russian-born Chief Conductor in its 135-year history, along comes this invaluable record of the first. Whereas the family of Kirill Petrenko moved to Vienna the year after the Wall came down, Lew Ljewitsch Borchard (who de-Russianised himself as Leo) went to Berlin.

The two conductors are also far less known to the musical public than their storied colleagues in post, from von Bülow to Rattle: a matter of choice in the case of Petrenko, who gives no interviews and has made next to no recordings. Quirks of history have kept Borchard in the shadows. As a student of Hermann Scherchen, he stood at the opposite artistic pole from Furtwängler, who guarded his power no less jealously than his eventual successor, Karajan; having been entrusted in the 1930s with concerts of the kind of classical pops repertoire on these Telefunken sides, Borchard would have been that successor had he not been shot by a jittery GI in post-war Berlin, three months after his appointment in 1945.

The greatest pleasure to be taken from this cheerful medley is in Borchard's evident skill as a recording conductor. His understanding of the process, and its limitations at the time, is thorough. From the balancing of melody and accompaniment in Wotan's Farewell, both within the orchestra and beneath Hans Reinmar, it is easy to understand why Klemperer used Borchard as a second pair of ears at the Linden Opera during one of his periodic crises of confidence.

The orchestration of a Mendelssohn fantasy suggests that 'Andreae' (presumably Volkmar Andreae, although the documentation is no more specific) was

familiar with the composer's own revision of his Octet Scherzo to fit within the First Symphony. No less than the Grieg, Boccherini and Tchaikovsky items, it reveals a French-style delicacy of response that could hardly be anticipated from the orchestra's contemporary recordings with Horenstein and Furtwängler, and which it has taken Rattle's tenure to uncover once more.

Put Rattle and Furtwängler side by side in the finale of Haydn's Symphony No 88 and they sound uncannily identical. It is Borchard, doubtless fired by Scherchen's 'period' scholarship and sensibilities, who comes close to a modern Haydn magician such as Thomas Fey with his teasing play of tempi and broad relish of a vernacular spirit to Haydn's invention.

Peter Quantrill

'La Harpe Reine'

'Musique à la Cour de Marie-Antoinette'

Gluck Orphée et Eurydice –

Dance of the Blessed Spirits^a

Haydn Symphony No 85, 'La Reine'

Hermann Harp Concerto No 1, Op 9^a

Krumpholtz Harp Concerto No 5, Op 7^a

^aXavier de Maistre hp

Les Arts Florissants / William Christie

Harmonia Mundi © HAF890 2276 (70' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Chapelle Royale, Versailles, June 27, 2016



'La Reine Harpe' runs the disc's title, the queen in question being Marie

Antoinette, who did for the harp what Frederick the Great had done for the flute a generation earlier. By 1780 the harp had become the must-play instrument for French demoiselles; and its popularity in the dying *ancien régime* attracted foreign teachers and virtuosos to Paris, notably the Bohemian Jan Krumpholtz. While he played his concertos himself, he also wrote with one eye on the amateur market, as exemplified by this concerto of 1778 – coincidentally the year of Mozart's Flute and Harp Concerto. This is rococo entertainment music at its most decorously pastel, though there is a mild charm in the slow movement, based on a French air, 'O ma tendre musette', and the contredanse finale. I can't imagine a more persuasive performance than that by Xavier de Maistre, imaginatively exploiting what he dubs the 'incomparably diaphanous sonorities' of a restored 18th-century pedal harp. Moments of slightly wheezy tuning apart, Les Arts Florissants are lively enough

From a dissolute Duke
to blundering buccaneers,
from folly finally forgiven
to courtship's complications.



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in Krumpholtz's modest accompaniments, though after the first movement's no-nonsense orchestral introduction, de Maistre turns out to have a rather more spacious idea of what Krumpholtz implied by *Allegro moderato*.

I'd never heard of Johann David Hermann, composer of the other concerto here. In mitigation, neither had *Grove* or the *Gramophone* catalogue. Again, de Maistre's playing is a marvel of delicate colouring and shimmering, perfectly even passagework. He just about kept my attention in stress-free music that ripples along agreeably enough, with the odd pretty *cantabile* tune en route, but makes zero demands on the emotions and intellect.

Allegedly a favourite of Marie Antoinette, the Haydn symphony is, of course, by far the most substantial item in this concert from the Versailles Chapelle Royale. The 20-strong period band – far smaller than the Parisian orchestra for which Haydn wrote the symphony – is not at its best here. If this is to be played as chamber music, it needs more refinement – and poetry – than we get in this brisk jog through the notes. There's some scrambled, rhythmically unstable playing in both the first movement and the smartly paced Romanze, and violin intonation can be off-centre. The finale has wit and spirit, and the burbling bassoon cadenza in the Minuet's Trio may make you smile, though this, and the subsequent rescoring of the tune for bassoon solo, wear less well on repetition. Recommended mainly to harp enthusiasts, above all for de Maistre's dazzling mastery of the instrument.

Richard Wigmore

'Music for my Love, Vol 1'

Brahms Von ewiger Liebe, Op 43 No 1

(arr Ragner Söderlind)

Casulana Il vostro dipartir (arr Colin Matthews)

B Dean Angels' Wings (Music for Yodit)

Elcock Song for Yodit, Op 23 **A Ford** Sleep

Holloway Music for Yodit **Kerem A** Farewell for Yodit **J Lord** Zarabanda solitaria (arr Paul Mann)

Pickard ...forbidding mourning...

Ruders Lullaby for Yodit **Söderlind** Å, dem svalande vind...: 15 Variations on a Norwegian Folktune, Op 120

Kodály Philharmonic Orchestra /

Paul Mann

Toccata Classics © TOCC0333 (63' • DDD)



In October 2014 Yodit Tekle – the partner of Toccata Classics' founder

Martin Anderson – was diagnosed with cancer. Anderson asked Steve Elcock to write 'a few notes' to comfort her in her illness, and in a single day Elcock composed the charming *Song for Yodit*. Tragically, she died a few months later; Anderson canvassed composers that he knew (and he knows quite a few) to write memorial pieces for her, all for string orchestra, following Elcock's format. To his astonishment, 100 composers (including some prominent names, several included here, plus – to come – David Matthews, Matthew Taylor, Anthony Payne and many more) have undertaken to do so. Forty works have been delivered thus far. This, then, is the first volume in an enterprise quite unprecedented in modern composition – or recording.

I had the pleasure, unlike most of the composers, to have known Yodit a little. She was a woman of quiet dignity and this quality has been captured in this remarkable sequence of works which – for all the diversity of style, scale and format – plays through like one huge mega-composition. Much is elegiac, as one would expect, but there are future classics: Poul Ruders's *Lullaby*, its context changed utterly by its final chord; John Pickard's Donne-inspired ...*forbidding mourning*...; Ragnar Söderlind's brilliant variation set; and Colin Matthews's magical arrangement of Maddalena Casulana's beautiful 1570 madrigal, which closes the programme.

The performances are sensitively realised under Paul Mann's firm direction (his idiomatic arrangement of Jon Lord also features). There could well be another eight or nine discs in this series; if anywhere near the quality of this first volume, they will be self-recommending. A really wonderful disc that I have played over and over.

Guy Rickards

'La Reine'

JC Bach Endimione - Semplicetto,

ancor non sai? **Haydn** Symphony

No 85, 'La Reine' **Rigel** Symphony,

Op 12 No 4 **Sarti** Didone abbandonata - lo d'amore, oh Dio! mi moro?

©Sandrine Piau sop

Le Concert de la Loge / Julien Chauvin

Aparté © AP131 (59' • DDD)



This is the first disc in what promises to be a recording of all six of Haydn's 'Paris'

Symphonies, coupled with other works supposedly performed during the same period by the same organisation, the Concert Spirituel. Such contextualisation puts one in mind of Giovanni Antonini's continuing Haydn cycle for Alpha, scheduled for completion in 2032, which places the symphonies alongside pieces (by Haydn himself and others) that are chosen to show them in a new light.

Julien Chauvin has come up with a trio of gems: a turbulent *Sturm und Drang* symphony by Henri-Joseph Rigel and extended showpiece arias by Giuseppe Sarti and JC Bach. The Rigel is certainly a tour de force, its tempos and rhythms tautly wound and its dark C minor colouring inviting a language replete with plenty of dissonance and agitation. It most reminded me of Kraus's symphony in the same key but without quite the instant memorability of that work or any number of Haydn's own *Sturm und Drang* symphonies. It's played with bags of verve, in a more open acoustic than the only other recording I know (by Concerto Köln in 2008), and with the all-important horns encouraged to make the most of their parts.

The two arias appear to have been performed as showpieces in Paris in the 1780s and '90s. Sarti's is a faintly oriental-sounding concoction with fruity oboe and bassoon obbligatos, while the 'London' Bach's is a thoroughly virtuosio coloratura number with a challenging, chattering flute part, showstoppingly sung and played by Sandrine Piau with flautist Tami Krausz. In among it all, it makes you wonder whether Mozart had in mind Bach's accompanied cadenza when he came to compose the 'Incarnatus' of his C minor Mass.

The Haydn is the main attraction, of course, and is given a performance of infectious vitality in the modern-historical style: the slow movement is not slow (although not as fast as Norrington takes it – Sony Classical, 7/15) and neither is the Menuetto, but the finale bounces along at a fine clip, and the opening movement is full of the stately charm it requires – not to mention being far better played than a near-simultaneous release of the same symphony from Les Arts Florissants (see page 37).

David Threshier

Rigel – comparative version:

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Shostakovich's Piano Concerto No 1

Pianist **Boris Giltburg** looks over the score of this youthful work with Geoffrey Norris

The key thing I wanted to ask Boris Giltburg was about tempo changes in the opening movement. Practically all the performances of Shostakovich's First Piano Concerto that I have heard over the years observe fluctuations that are not indicated in the score I have at home, an ostensibly 'standard' one issued in Moscow by the State Music Publisher in 1963. This is one of those anomalies that you always mean to look into but somehow never get round to doing, but here with Giltburg seated at the piano in his green room at the Warsaw Philharmonic (where he is preparing for performances of Prokofiev's Third Concerto) it seems a golden opportunity to delve further.

Are these tempo details just received practice, or is there a more fact-based reason? Giltburg uses the score published in the US by the Leeds Music Corporation, in which the fluctuations of speed are all written in. There is a series of markings in the opening pages of the first movement, a shifting up of gear from an *Allegretto* of crotchet=96 at the start to 108 at figure 2, then a further hike to 132 just after fig 3 to 160 at the *Allegro vivace* just after fig 6. My Russian score has none of this, but does go out on a limb by putting the crotchet=160 *Allegro vivace* marking at fig 2 instead of figure 6, making the movement's first main theme improbably fast. Checking later in all the scores I can lay my hands on (the 1934 Russian first edition of the orchestral score, the Boosey & Hawkes miniature score and Vol 12 of the Shostakovich Complete Edition published in 1982) I find that they are all in agreement, and that it is the 1963 score that is out of step. The Complete Edition identifies those points where it differs, and, like Giltburg's Leeds Corporation score, generally follows the text of the first Russian edition, which in turn follows Shostakovich's autograph manuscript.

For all that Giltburg says that he tends 'to trust Russian editions over Western ones', the 1963 Russian score is a document that needs to be used with caution. But there are also points in the First Concerto where Giltburg and his conductor Vasily Petrenko have felt the urge not to adhere to the letter of the score as regards the ebbs and flows but to follow their interpretative instincts. Giltburg, for example, likes to inject a burst of speed just after fig 13 of the first movement where the piano is temporarily unaccompanied by the orchestra and where the music can certainly withstand



Boris Giltburg in the recording studio with scores close at hand

a bit of harum-scarum. Then there is the orchestral reprise of the main theme at fig 17, where Petrenko adopts a much slower pace than he does in the exposition, creating an effect that is reflective and eerie.

There are other instances where pianist and conductor have discussed the emotional implications of the music and its character. Giltburg points to a passage in the first movement (fig 18), where the solo trumpet has a slowish, expressive upward figure before the piano launches headlong again into something much chirpier. The dilemma was whether this music should be treated lightly ('like having a holiday in the south of Russia') or with 'more teeth and bite'. Giltburg and Petrenko went for the teeth and bite. 'It's like a circus', says Giltburg. 'But it's more of a Stephen King circus – with nasty clowns.'

Such perceptive minutiae could not be gleaned from Shostakovich's own recording of the concerto, made with



The historical view

The composer interviewed
Shostakovich in Sovetskoye iskusstvo
interview, 1933

'I cannot describe the content of my concerto with any means other than those with which the concerto is written.'

A scholarly view, part one
Musicologist Anatoly Solovtsov, 1947

'The instrumental make-up of this [concerto] is reminiscent of the orchestra of Bach's time, for example the B minor Orchestral Suite: strings, keyboard and one wind instrument.'

A scholarly view, part two
Musicologist Leonid Danilevich, 1963

'The texture of the concerto...is the antithesis of the showy virtuoso style... The composer gravitates towards the pellucid texture of Beethovenian and pre-Beethovenian pianism.'

the Orchestre National de la Radiodiffusion Française under André Cluytens, nor indeed from a live performance from 1940 available on YouTube, and I wondered to what extent a pianist of today might look to Shostakovich's performances for guidance. 'As performers we take a pragmatic view of composers' recordings', says Giltburg with a glint in his eye. 'We use their recordings as a source when it helps our cause, and if it doesn't we can just say that it is a matter of interpretation. For me, Shostakovich's performances are a little bit too straightforward', and he cites a passage right at the end of the concerto (fig 76) where Shostakovich – as a composer – writes a hearty knees-up of a tune but – as a pianist – plays it strictly in tempo and without any particular spotlight on it. Giltburg prefers to pull back here and give those opening chords (marked *fff*) a good, robust bounce and impetus.

'It's impossible to say whether anything is meant in earnest or whether it's all a joke' – Boris Giltburg

This tune, bringing a touch of Jewish wedding festivities to the proceedings, is one of several quotes that occur in the score of the First Concerto, from a snatch of Beethoven's *Appassionata* Sonata at the start to a rip-roaring snippet of his *Rage over a Lost Penny* in the finale, together with a reference to a Haydn sonata and, in the finale, to the nursery rhyme 'Poor Jenny is a weeping', given to the solo trumpet (fig 63) and interrupted by a *fff* thwack of a piano chord.

In the music's textures there are hints of 18th-century Classicism and of the Baroque, notably in the third movement which opens in the manner of a Bach fantasia (Giltburg's teacher has written 'Bachian freedom' against that passage in his score). The Eighth String Quartet, of which Giltburg has made a piano arrangement that he plays on this same disc, also contains many self-quotations, but the mood there is far more inward-looking than in this exuberant concerto.

Shostakovich wrote the concerto in 1933, around the same time as his opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* but before the ignominy that was heaped upon him by the *Pravda* editorial 'Chaos Instead of Music' in 1936. As Giltburg says, the concerto shows Shostakovich at his most confident, giving every sign that he had enjoyed the 1920s in Soviet Russia where the arts scene was so vibrant and multi-voiced, with 'jazz, Berg, Schoenberg, nonsense poetry, Symbolist poetry and Meyerhold theatre all contributing to the feeling that they were part of an international dialogue'.

The concerto's quotes are not merely slotted in but are integrated into the life of the piece as a whole. 'If you just make a list of sections and spot what comes from where you will never get a sense of the concerto', says Giltburg. 'The overall harmonic language is pure Shostakovich.' Nevertheless, he will admit that he loves 'the kind of mayhem and how haphazard things are. Seriousness and tongue-in-cheek are in every bar. It's impossible to say whether anything is meant in earnest or whether it's all a joke.' **G**

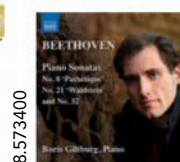
► To read Gramophone's review of Giltburg's Shostakovich turn to page 34



"Boris Giltburg's originality stems from a convergence of heart and mind, served by immaculate technique and motivated by a deep and abiding love for one of the 20th century's greatest composer-pianists."

– Gramophone

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Chamber



Richard Bratby on Hans Gál's Clarinet Quintet and Trio:

'The sincerity and craftsmanship of this music is self-evident, likewise its undertow of melancholy' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 45**



Caroline Gill enjoys cello music by the Mendelssohn siblings:

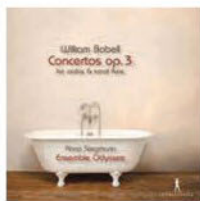
'There is a warm sense of intimacy in the way Neary and Frith constantly respond to each other with tiny gestures' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 47**

Babell

Six Flute Concertos, Op 3. Sinfonia

Anna Stegmann *rec* Ensemble Odyssee

Pan Classics (P) PC10348 (75' • DDD)



'A great player at a small expense... Mr Babell...at once gratifies idleness and

vanity' is what the music historian Charles Burney had to say about William Babell, the English composer and organist who achieved fame through performing flashy keyboard transcriptions of popular Handel arias. It must be said that Burney's wasn't a universally held view, as Johann Mattheson considered Babell to be a greater organ virtuoso than Handel himself. Time wasn't on Babell's side to prove his detractors wrong, though, as he died aged just 33, in 1723, from 'intemperate habits'.

Perhaps as a result of Babell's unfortunate (and intriguing) early death, it is his organ and harpsichord arrangements that have headlined his posthumous reputation, so this recording is interesting for drawing attention to the fact that Babell also composed some of the earliest English examples of the solo-instrument concerto with string accompaniment. His Op 3 six-concerto set appears here in a new critical edition by Andrea Friggi that attempts to correct some of the clumsy curiosities of the only surviving source (a manuscript printed three years after Babell's death). Most particularly, this has removed the ripieno violins, and the result is a light-textured and adaptable one-to-a-part ensemble that's a perfect match for the concertos' zip-along chirpiness. Ensemble Odyssee's own crisply perky readings then fit them like a glove, with Anna Stegmann herself equally on the button, dispatching the almost relentless recorder passagework with fluent ease.

Smart performances aside, though, I haven't fallen in love with this disc, because to my ears these are one-flavour frothy virtuoso bonbons that bring

Burney's words to mind. So, while they're certainly very cheerful, you shouldn't expect to feel moved.

Charlotte Gardner

Bernstein • Foote • Korngold

'American Moments'

Bernstein Piano Trio Foote Piano Trio No 2, Op 65 Korngold Piano Trio, Op 1

Neave Trio

Chandos (P) CHAN10924 (69' • DDD)



There are some combinations on 'American Moments' that feel more like conflicts than contrasts. Initial appearances suggest it is a recital of piano trios by American composers – Arthur Foote is often cited as the first successful American composer wholly trained in the States; Bernstein is the epitome of the all-American composer. But Korngold was born in what is now the Czech Republic, and did not arrive in California until he was in his early 40s. It is true that the Hollywood sparkle of his composition was in place long before he set foot in America – the occasionally schmaltzy Piano Trio, Op 1, was written when he was barely a teenager – but he was, and remained, firm in his own assertion of his identity as Viennese.

This confusion about whether the programming has been predicated on a fundamental misapprehension or deliberate juxtaposition (and if so, to what end) permeates the whole of the Neave Trio's survey, which is unsettling. Not least because all three works are treated in largely the same way, with little apparent difference between their generalist approach to the immaturities of the Korngold, the far more complex harmonic material of the Foote and the rhythmic drive and cultural references of the Bernstein. This results in an overhandling of the third movement of the Korngold that rather exposes its shortcomings, a

frustrating lack of appeasement in the glorious ascent of the *Tranquillo* of the Foote, and a lack of technical precision in the Bernstein that leaves it feeling flat in places and undersold in others.

And so, although their boundless enthusiasm is infectious for this repertoire in a way that it was not for their Fauré and Shostakovich (privately issued in 2013), it nevertheless remains frustrating in its lack of discernment. **Caroline Gill**

Brahms

Piano Quartets – No 1, Op 25; No 3, Op 60

Anton Barakhovsky *vn* Alexander Zemtsov *va*

Wolfgang Emanuel Schmidt *vc* Eldar Nebolsin *pf*

Naxos (M) 8 572798 (74' • DDD)



If you're sitting still at the end of Brahms's First Piano Quartet, with its madcap,

almost parodistic Hungarian gypsy finale, then something's wrong. Certainly this new recording sets the feet going right from the off, its *Presto* marking observed with aplomb. This is the first recording from this fine Russian-German line-up but you wouldn't know it from the confidence of their collective playing. Other highlights in the First Quartet are an eerie Intermezzo and a flowing *Andante*, effortlessly phrased. By comparison, Capuçon/Caussé/Angelich are on the slow side, though irresistibly effulgent. Hamelin and the Leopold, closer in speed to the new recording, balance piano and string textures with great refinement and no one plays that gypsy finale more thrillingly; Ian Brown of the Nash is, by comparison, just a little polite.

The Onyx and Hyperion sets were recorded just two years apart (in 2007 and 2005 respectively) and have in common violinist Marianne Thorsen and viola player Lawrence Power, yet it's striking how much more yearning the slow movement of the Third Quartet sounds in the Hyperion recording, the great cello



From Brahms to Schoenberg: the Kuss Quartet make musical sense of a compelling coupling

melody beautifully wrought by Kate Gould, Thorsen then duetting with her with great subtlety. By comparison, the Naxos players seem to be a little self-conscious, the phrases not following as easily as in the finest accounts; in the preceding Scherzo, too, I found the fiendish chordal piano-writing a touch opaque compared to Angelich. But the outer movements fare better, the new group particularly impressive in the many passages of heightened anguish in the first and the almost orchestral richness of the climaxes in the finale.

In the end, though, this new recording doesn't topple those on Hyperion and Virgin in my affections. **Harriet Smith**

Piano Quartets – selected comparisons:

Leopold Trio, Hamelin (1/07) (HYPE) CDA67471/2

Nash Ens (2/09) (ONYX) ONYX4029

R & G Capuçon, Caussé, Angelich

(2/09) (VIRG/ERAT) 519310-2

Brahms · Schoenberg

Brahms String Quartet No 3, Op 67. Sechs Lieder, Op 85^a – No 1, Sommerabend; No 2, Mondenschein. Wie Melodien zieht es mir, Op 105 No 1^a **Schoenberg** String Quartet No 2, Op 10^a

^a**Mojca Erdmann** sop **Kuss Quartet**
Onyx © ONYX4166 (73' • DDD • T/b)



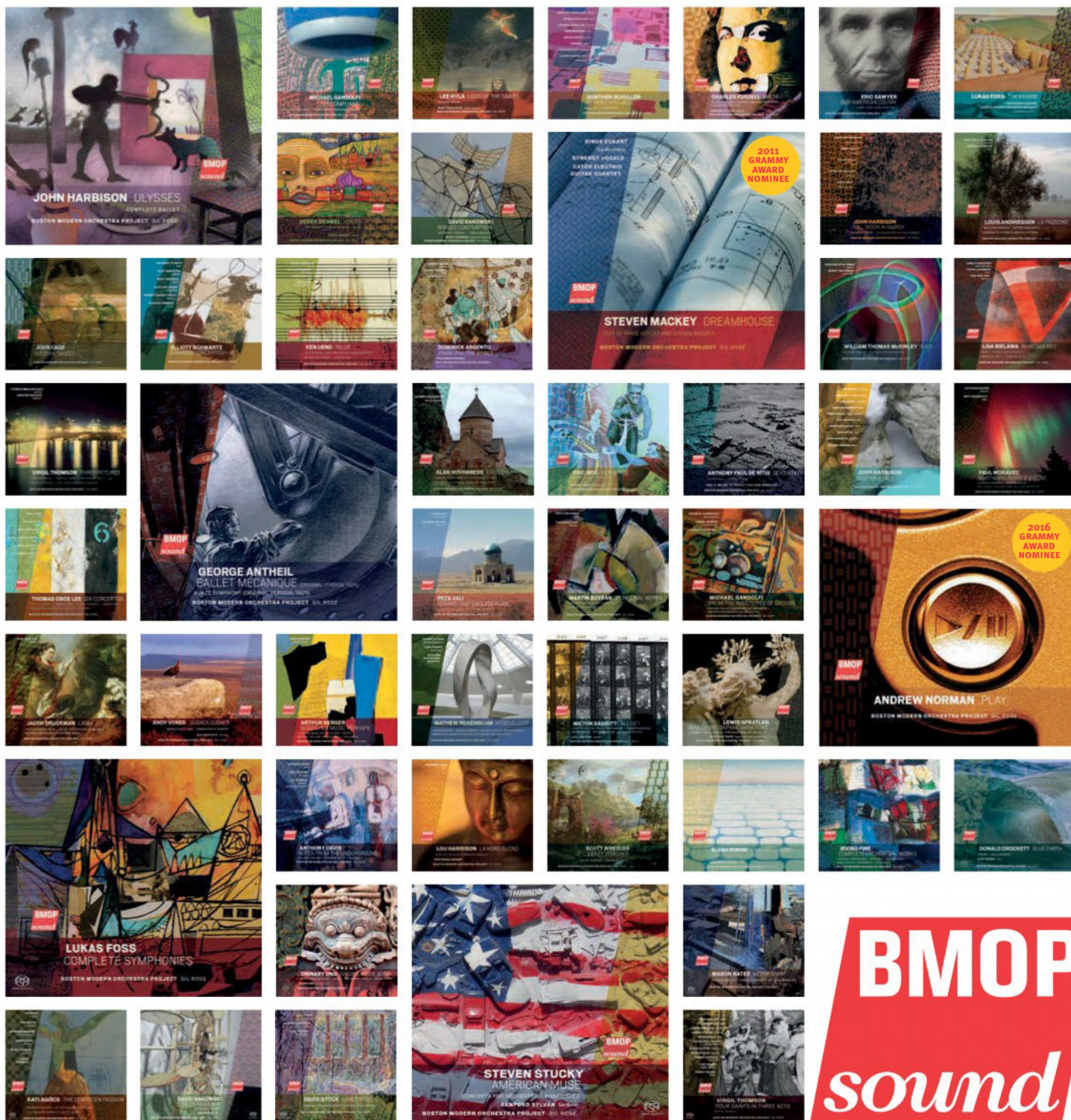
My usual impression of Brahms's Op 67 Quartet, that it opens mid-flow, is heightened by the Kuss Quartet and their jittery, over-caffeinated performance of the exposition. The repeat is more poised but still sounds like Brahms seen through the light of those who came after him. Each voice is strongly differentiated; more nervy vibrato, especially from the leader, discolours the theme of the *Andante*, the central section of which is not as 'sweet and graceful' as all that.

Even so, this approach works in context. The rustic Scherzo is effectively staged as a male-female dialogue on the verge of neurasthenia, the trio haunted and hesitant, as if taking place in a forest clearing halfway between the poor unfortunate in *Erwartung* and the drowning corpse of *Wozzeck's* Marie.

Thus we are prepared, as if by a chapter in *Style and Idea*, for Schoenberg's journey to the precipice of tonality and back again in his Second Quartet. From the composer-approved Kolisch Quartet onwards, ensembles generally played this music

with the tonal opulence it deserves. Because the LaSalle Quartet could play Ligeti and Lutosławski for breakfast did not mean they would eschew the full Romantic apparatus of *legato* and *portamento* when Schoenberg himself demands it, which is frequently. Only in the last decade or two have historically informed approaches to Haydn and Mozart begun to problematise Schoenberg, paradoxically making him a new and disturbing figure all over again. The composer would have seen the irony.

In this regard, the sound-body of the Kuss is fuller and healthier than recent accounts of the Schoenberg from the Diotima and Asasello quartets, tonally comparable to the Leipzig Quartet though with a narrower vibrato. They impart to the opening movements a persuasive sense of the composer wrestling with his material, struggling to bend it into Brahmsian shapes until the music pulls him where he dared not go. Soprano Mojca Erdmann is on commanding form and well placed within the body of the quartet as a fifth voice. Her arrival brings a welcome additional urgency; the most heartfelt, full-blooded playing on the disc is reserved for the coda of 'Litanei', as the key turns in the door to the finale's 'other planet'. I am still waiting for an Emerson/Fleming account



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after their superb disc of Berg and Wellesz (Decca, 10/15), but the Kuss Quartet's unique coupling marks them out as an ensemble to pay attention to. **Peter Quantrill**

Fux

Concentus musico-instrumentalis

Neue Hofkapelle Graz /

Lucia Froihofer, Michael Hell

CPO     CPO777 980-2 (122' • DDD)



We encounter the name of Johann Joseph Fux (1660-1741) in scholarly books more often than we hear his music. A favoured composer of three successive Habsburg emperors, he was a widely admired master of counterpoint, not least because of his famous treatise *Gradus ad Parnassum* (1725). Several recordings in recent years have revealed that he was a masterful composer of church music, but his instrumental works are recorded infrequently. His first publication, *Concentus musico-instrumentalis* (Nuremberg, 1701) was dedicated to the future emperor Joseph I. The nine part-books contain seven so-called 'partitas', actually diverse overtures, serenades and sinfonias for various forces, ranging from a chamber sonata ('sinfonia') for recorder, oboe and continuo up to a large-scale Serenade in C major scored for oboes, bassoon, trumpets and strings.

Neue Hofkapelle Graz present the first complete recording of Fux's anthology, and dedicate it poignantly to Nikolaus Harnoncourt (who recorded two pieces from *Concentus musico-instrumentalis* on an early EMI album in 1963 and a different selection for Teldec's *Das Alte Werk* in 1970). The sole surviving set of part-books is in the Deutsche Staatsbibliothek, Berlin, but four pages missing from the viola part-book necessitated judicious reconstruction by harpsichordist Michael Hell (who also plays recorder and co-directs the ensemble with violinist Lucia Froihofer). The pieces are a cosmopolitan hotchpotch of French, Italian and German styles. The spirit of Lully is close at hand in the juxtaposition of lively and tender French dances in a Sinfonia in B flat. In a six-part Overture in G minor there are lovely passages for oboes and bassoon, exquisite solo violin-playing by Froihofer in a charming Italianate minuet, and the variations within the melancholic Passacaille reminded me of Purcell at his best. An Overture in C major is played by a string quartet with attractive conversational ease (a

percussionist gets a little carried away, especially without a larger ensemble to moderate his impact), whereas 27 musicians make a festive sound in the Serenade in C major, in particular the expert contributions of entirely natural trumpets played by Jean-Fran ois Madeuf and Julian Zimmermann. These performances of musical wisdom and creative scholarship confirm that Fux was not merely a theoretical musician.

David Vickers

Gade

'Chamber Works, Vol 2'

String Quartet in E minor (with extra movements). First movement of a Piano Trio in B flat. Scherzo in C sharp minor for Piano Quartet

Ensemble MidtVest

CPO   CPO777 165-2 (58' • DDD)



Each piece on this second volume in Ensemble MidtVest's survey of chamber music by Niels Gade is troubled by issues of organisation or maturity. We hear Gade's E minor String Quartet (1889), whose first movement was inserted from a different work in D minor (transposed up a tone), while the jettisoned original opener and a discarded *Andantino* are also included. To finish we have the early *Scherzo* for piano quartet (1836). In between comes the second recent recording of the first movement of an aborted Piano Trio in B flat (1839).

As on the Danish Piano Trio's recording, this charming and not insubstantial movement (14 minutes here) suggests that focusing on an abstract, heroic narrative – rather than flagellating himself with Mendelssohn's neoclassical rule book – drew more individual and charming music from Gade. The instrumental interplay is delicious and the melodies soar; the result is, ironically, closer to the spirit of Mendelssohn and Schumann than Gade probably imagined. There's no shortage of fresh air in this performance, but the Danish Piano Trio are more high-octane and reactive.

Conversely, all the tinkering with the E minor String Quartet shows. Those moments of Schumann-style momentum never last and Gade's melodies can appear stilted, built for development rather than born of inspiration. He does conjure some charm in the finale (shades of his mentor's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*) and we hear hints of his Danish tendency towards

humour and contrast. But you emerge from this often beautifully played disc – even from the early Scherzo, with its fertile, catchy main theme – with the impression of a sturdy musical engineer. Only the relatively short span of the B flat Trio shows that Gade was, occasionally, rather more. **Andrew Mellor**

Piano Trio movement – selected comparison:

Danish Piano Trio (1/16) (DACA) 8 226119

G l

'Chamber Music for Clarinet'

Clarinet Quintet, Op 107. Clarinet Trio, Op 97. Serenade, Op 93

Ensemble Burletta

Toccata Classics   TOCC0377 (66' • DDD)



The Hans G l revival gathers momentum, and close on the heels of Avie's recent

symphony and concerto releases comes another pair of premiere recordings, this time from Toccata Classics. If you've already been tempted into the lyrical, warm-hearted sound world of this exiled Viennese late-Romantic, you won't need much encouragement. Equally, these three neglected chamber works would make a thoroughly beguiling entry point.

The big story here is the Clarinet Quintet. G l wears his influences with pride, with Brahms front and centre. There are long curving melodies, richly woven string textures and a bittersweet slow movement with a lilting, gypsy-ish central interlude; overall, it's hard to avoid the word 'autumnal'. But does the fact that the Quintet was written by the 87-year-old composer in (astonishingly) 1977 really matter at this point? The sincerity and craftsmanship of this music is self-evident, likewise its undertow of melancholy.

This is a major rediscovery, and clarinetist Shelley Levy makes a sympathetic champion – plangent in her bottom register and accompanied by a quartet whose wide-grained tone quality suits this music well. Ensemble Burletta have a natural feeling for the ebb and flow of G l's style in the earlier Clarinet Trio and Serenade (the latter also a premiere recording – a suite of miniatures with a brisk sense of humour), moving easily between song and playful wit, and savouring the piquancy of G l's Strauss-like surprise modulations. The sound is well balanced and natural – you wouldn't guess that this disc was recorded at three separate locations. Warmly recommended.

Richard Bratby

GRAMOPHONE *Collector*

GALLIC DUO SONATAS

Caroline Gill immerses herself in French Romanticism, with young French artists as her guide



Irène Duval and Pierre-Yves Hodique take us on a backwards journey through the Belle Époque

Considering the difficult job the French had in incorporating the sonata into their musical spectrum when it first arrived from Italy in the 17th century, it is all the more notable that chamber music became one of the most defining genres of the French musical identity so quickly. It betrays a pioneering spirit that, by the time the likes of Franck, Ravel and Ysaÿe were writing, had become less a case of not wanting to be left behind than a defining feature of a unique musical language.

That Frenchness may already be sewn into the lining of all the pieces in this little cornucopia of discs by thoroughly modern, young French performers of French and French-influenced repertoire. But whereas the challenge in non-native recordings is to reproduce it without any air of self-consciousness, the most effective route often lies with performers whose collective imaginations share a heritage with the composers themselves.

There are many such recordings of the cello transcription of Franck's Violin Sonata, but there is room for more – especially if they are as fine as the version of **Victor Julien-Laferrière** and **Adam Laloum**. The cello is a remarkably good medium

for this piece, in fact (Franck himself certainly accepted the transcription without complaint), and Julien-Laferrière and Laloum follow the contours of its melodies, which play their hand surprisingly early in the first movement, with less strain than is usually evident in performances on violin. That understated elegance extends to their Brahms E minor Sonata, too, which feels like a bit of an odd one out (albeit with French presentation) in that context, but is most striking in the Debussy Cello Sonata that ends the recital. Here, the lines disappear into infinitely long daisy chains that in the end suggest that all we are hearing is background.

To that end, there are points where the piano can feel a bit too present, but those small periods of heavy-handedness simply end up as opportunities for contrast, and more so than in the other cello-and-piano disc in this assortment: music of Fauré and Ropartz by **Louis Rodde** and **Gwendal Giguelay**. Although the feel is similarly modern, it is distinctly more straightforward in its treatment of the (undeservedly) little-known sonata of Joseph-Guy Ropartz and the two of Fauré. Which approach suits the music better is a matter of taste in repertoire that

tends to take off very quickly and then do all its tricks in the sky. The violin can immediately force the music under tension but the cello can give it a welcome sense of space to breathe. Under a light bow like Rodde's it can create a far greater sense of variety, too, and both players track the mercurial trail of the melodies of both composers with engaging skill, making it clear in their polished performance that any criticisms of Fauré as being too sober in his old age are misplaced.

It is a fine line to tread, though, and not all performances manage to unlock the music in the same way. **Stéphanie-Marie Degand** and **Christie Julien** are certainly very efficient in bringing out the vast spread of styles that influences the pieces on their regrettably cheesily entitled 'So French' collection of Saint-Saëns, Franck, Ysaÿe, Massenet and Ravel. That's not to say that they are unsubtle, but they absorb the complicated elements of the music's stylistic influences entirely naturally. In the Franck Sonata in particular and also in Ravel's folksy *Tzigane*, this enables them to bring out elements that are inherently lyrical and beautiful entirely without question, and with a finesse that makes it gripping to listen to.

As with the presence of the Brahms sonata on Julien-Laferrrière's recording, the Kreisler that appears on the disc 'Dedications' from the Dutch violinist **Rosanne Philippens** and French pianist **Julien Quentin** has a similar whiff of non-French distraction about it. The music on this recording is undeniably for show – it could hardly be anything else when it is all dedicated to either another composer or another violinist, hence the inclusions of Kreisler's compositions for Ysaÿe – but there is extraordinary attention to detail in Philippens and Julien's performance. It is beautifully warm without being self-indulgent or aggressive. Philippens's strongest impression is one of controlled legato, which drives the muscular passages as much as the intensely lyrical ones into which they continually disappear, as it does in her performance of the *Lento maestoso* of Ysaÿe's Fourth Sonata in particular.

Of all the recordings in this collection, 'Poèmes' – the recital disc from **Irène Duval** and pianist **Pierre-Yves Hodique** – is the one that most effectively balances the slick new world of French performance with the smoky, claustrophobic atmosphere of music still soaked in the nostalgia of the Belle Époque. There is a real sense of being taken back through the mists of time by this closely recorded disc: starting with the sonata Poulenc wrote during the Second World War, it reverses through Szymanowski's filigree *La fontaine d'Arbuse* (written in 1915 and containing some of his most beautiful melodies), Chausson's epic *Poème* of 1896 and the Fauré Sonata of 1876 to Ernst's 1854 *Grand Caprice* on Schubert's 'Erlkönig'. **G**

THE RECORDINGS



Various Cpsrs Cello Sonatas
Julien-Laferrrière, Laloum
Mirare **Ⓜ** MIR310



Fauré, Ropartz Cello Sonatas
Rodde, Giguélay
NoMadMusic **Ⓜ** NMM037



Various Cpsrs 'So French'
Degand, Julien
NoMadMusic **Ⓜ** NMM035



Various Cpsrs 'Dedications'
Philippens, Quentin
Channel Classics **Ⓜ** CCS38516



Various Cpsrs 'Poèmes'
Duval, Hodique
Mirare **Ⓜ** MIR312

Haydn

String Quartets – Op 1 No 1;
Op 33 No 5; Op 77 No 1
Goldmund Quartet
Naxos **Ⓜ** 8 573701 (57' • DDD)



This release is essentially a showcase for the Goldmund Quartet, and it's hard not to warm to a young ensemble with its priorities so evidently in the right place. Haydn is still the indispensable touchstone for any serious quartet, and this debut disc covers both the beginning and end of Haydn's quartet-writing career, with Op 33 No 5 falling almost exactly in the middle.

The Goldmunds make a beautiful sound, elegant and transparent, with a real sense that these four players are friends both on and off the concert platform. From the very opening of Op 1 No 1 – and the bright, buoyant feeling of an ensemble tugging at the leash – it's clear that they take this music as seriously as it demands. Second violinist Pinchas Adt talks of 'a lot of loving attention to detail', and that's a good summary of these performances: whether in the nutty pizzicatos of Op 1's first Minuet, the artless opening smile of Op 33 No 5 or the refined blending of instrumental tone at the opening of Op 77 No 1's great *Adagio*.

Reservations? Such intense carefulness can sometimes feel a little mannered – the group's end-of-phrase *ritenutos* work better in the inner movements of Op 77 No 1 than the outer, and in the finale of Op 33 No 5 they're positively arch. Don't expect anything like the freewheeling fantasy that certain other emerging groups – Quatuor Zäide (Op 50; NoMadMusic, 3/16), say – bring to Haydn. But these are still very attractive readings, and you're never in any doubt that even the Goldmunds' misjudgements are born of love.

Richard Bratby

Hensel • Mendelssohn • Sterndale Bennett

Hensel Capriccio. Fantasia **Mendelssohn** Cello Sonatas – No 1, Op 45; No 2, Op 58
Sterndale Bennett Sonata Duo, Op 32
Alice Neary vc **Benjamin Frith** pf
Champs Hill **Ⓜ** CHRCD105 (82' • DDD)



Champs Hill has long been a master talent-spotter and although Alice Neary and

Benjamin Frith are both insightful and elegant musicians of long experience, they have remained too long under the radar. They more often work together as two-thirds of the Gould Piano Trio, and this duo recital disc of Mendelssohn, his family (sister Fanny Hensel) and close friends (William Sterndale Bennett) has all the benefits of their regular collaboration on full display.

There is a warm sense of intimacy in the way Neary and Frith constantly respond to each other with the minutest gestures (particularly well illustrated in the build-up into the second subject of the first movement of Mendelssohn's First Sonata). The closeness of the recording has something to do with this, too, occasionally resulting in a slight overpowering of the piano by Neary's glorious Gagliano cello, but in the context of this performance it merely serves to increase the feeling that you have been brought into the confidence of performers interested only in presenting the music in its best light.

Anyone undecided about the superiority of the best old Italian instruments should hear this recording, and in particular Neary's unselfish phrasing, the lightest of which is always warmly supported by her cello's rich tone. The programme is well chosen, too: from a period in which cello-and-piano repertoire was disappointingly thin, Neary and Frith have put together a clever combination of pieces that tell their own story. **Caroline Gill**

Jóhannsson

'Orphée'

Flight from the City. A Song for Europa.
The Drowned World. A Deal with Chaos.
A Pile of Dust. A Sparrow Alighted on Our Shoulder. Fragment I. By the Roes, and by the Hinds of the Field. The Radiant City. Fragment II. The Burning Mountain. De luce et umbra.
Good Morning, Midnight. Good Night, Day.
Orphic Hymn

Jóhann Jóhannsson pf/elects/pipe.org/elect.org

Hildur Guðnadóttir vc **Theatre of Voices** / **Paul Hillier**; **American Contemporary Music Ensemble**; **AIR Lyndhurst String Orchestra** / **Anthony Weeden**

DG **Ⓜ** 479 6021GH (47' • DDD)



Following the success of his soundtrack to James Marsh's 2014 biopic on the life of

Stephen Hawking, *The Theory of Everything* (which was nominated for an Academy Award and awarded the Golden Globe for Best Original Score in 2015), Jóhann

Jóhannsson is very much Hollywood's go-to composer at the moment. His score for the sci-fi drama *Arrival* will already have hit the cinema screens by the time you read this, and will be followed later in 2017 by music for the long-awaited sequel to the 1982 sci-fi classic *Blade Runner: Blade Runner 2049*.

All of which makes one wonder where Jóhannsson found time to compose music for 'Orphée', his first disc with Deutsche Grammophon since signing an exclusive contract in 2016. In fact, 'Orphée' is based on a series of musical ideas dating back to 2009 – 'simple contrapuntal themes with an ascending harmonic thrust', as the composer describes them. The Orpheus myth became a catalyst for further elaboration and development of these ideas, with Orpheus's gaze upon Eurydice functioning as a 'metaphor for artistic imagination'.

Other than *Orphic Hymn* (Jóhannsson's evocative setting of a short text from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, sung with sublime power and restraint by Paul Hillier's Theatre of Voices), the Orpheus story is only applied in a loose sense. It enables the composer to present the main theme – a rising stepwise melody that resolves upwards over a series of suspended chords – in a number of different guises, however, from a version for string orchestra in 'A Song for Europa', above which are laid shortwave broadcasts of coded messages from so-called Numbers Stations, to more straightforward presentations on pipe organ and string quartet, and the aforementioned *a cappella* setting. Jóhannsson's imaginative synthesis of spiritual minimalism and electronica will satisfy fans familiar with his soundtracks, but the overall impression one gets here is of a series of short cues for a film that has yet to be written. **Pwyl ap Siôn**

Ligeti

Six Bagatelles. Chamber Concerto.

Ten Pieces for Wind Quintet

Les Siècles / François-Xavier Roth

Les Siècles Live/Musicales Actes Sud © ASM26 (44' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Chapelle du Méjan, Arles, and the Cité de la Musique, Soissons, France, April 12-14, 2016



At first glance, this 44-minute disc bookending György Ligeti's 1970 Chamber

Concerto – a major work – with two occasional wind quintet pieces might feel a rather paltry offering compared with

Ligeti's Chamber Concerto paired with the Piano Concerto and *Melodien* as part of Teldec's complete Ligeti Project, or DG's classic Boulez recording placed alongside *Ramifications* and the Second String Quartet. But, word to the wise, if you consider yourself a Ligeti aficionado, you need to hear these tour de force, cream-of-the-crop performances by François-Xavier Roth and Les Siècles.

The booklet-notes don't specify how the ensemble's usual *modus operandi* of matching repertoire with historically appropriate instruments worked out here, but the group's keenly sensitive ears for timbre – honed in recent recordings of Stravinsky, Chabrier and Debussy – create performances of rare textural pliancy. Ligeti's 1953 student *Six Bagatelles* connects back to that early-20th-century French neoclassicism with which, as it leans towards Dadaism, the ensemble are so familiar. The opening *Allegro con spirito* might be the best Milhaud piece Milhaud never wrote, and Marion Ralincourt's laser-cutter flute and Hélène Mourot's guttural oboe push for a more unruly spectrum of sounds than is customary in wind quintet playing.

The *Ten Pieces*, from 1968, is a fully mature score that trailed many of the textures and techniques Ligeti would apply to the larger Chamber Concerto. But these 10 brief movements are, for now, suggestive vignettes, and Les Siècles dispatch them with deadpan throwaway curtness. The opening piece is classic micropolyphony – a polyphony of polyphonies, one of Ligeti's trademark techniques – and the thick carpet of lines weaved by a mere five musicians is a thing to behold.

Arguably, Reinbert de Leeuw and the Schönberg Ensemble treat you to a more explicitly dramatic Chamber Concerto, but the mood music of Les Siècles – an often serene surface with the vaguest hint of furious pedalling underneath – is very attractive and, again, their opulently buttery woodwind tone impresses (especially compared to Boulez's synthetic margarine). The penultimate movement of the *Ten Pieces* has the instruments trigger interference tones by bending the temperament; comparable moments in the Chamber Concerto are again exquisitely heard. And the manic slapstick deconstructing mechanisms of the third movement are all the more manic and slapstick for not being overdone.

Philip Clark

Chamber Concerto – selected comparisons:

Ens Intercontemporain, Boulez (1/84⁸) (DG) 423 244-2GC
Schönberg Ens, de Leeuw (5/01⁸) (WARN) 2564 60285-8

Rachmaninov · Tchaikovsky · Goldenweiser

'A la mémoire d'un grand artiste'

Goldenweiser Piano Trio, Op 31

Rachmaninov Trio élégiaque, Op 9^a

Tchaikovsky Piano Trio, Op 50

Piano Trio Schäfer Then-Bergh Yang with

***Kang-Un Kim** harmonium

Genuin © 2 GENI6437 (133' • DDD)



Tchaikovsky started things off by writing his A minor Piano Trio as a musical

memorial to Nikolay Rubinstein.

Rachmaninov then wrote his second *Trio élégiaque* in memory of Tchaikovsky, and Alexander Goldenweiser wrote his E minor Trio in memory of Rachmaninov. Alongside this sequence there can be added Arensky's D minor Trio, composed as a tribute to the departed cellist Karl Davydov, and Shostakovich's Second Trio, prompted by the death of his friend Ivan Sollertinsky. But it is particularly enterprising of the Piano Trio Schäfer Then-Bergh Yang to link together the Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninov and Goldenweiser: even though the first two are already healthily represented in the catalogue, the Goldenweiser, composed in 1950, seems otherwise to be available only on an old recording (from Revelation) featuring Goldenweiser himself on the piano with Leonid Kogan and Mstislav Rostropovich.

In terms of structure, Goldenweiser follows Tchaikovsky's pattern of an elegiac first movement followed by a theme and variations. The music lacks anything like the strength of profile that Tchaikovsky or Rachmaninov proffer in their own trios, though the performance itself is thoroughly sympathetic and well balanced instrumentally. The players are on much stronger ground with the Tchaikovsky and the Rachmaninov, in the latter deploying the optional harmonium to announce the theme of the central movement's variations. The playing blends poignancy with passion and some impressive projection and sensitive turns of phrase. The Tchaikovsky/Rachmaninov coupling alone would make the recording recommendable, and it is at least useful to have the Goldenweiser to complete the chain. **Geoffrey Norris**

Reinecke

'Chamber Music for Clarinet, Horn and Piano'

Fantasy Pieces, Op 22. Introduction and

Allegro appassionato, Op 256. Nocturne,

Op 112. Trio, Op 274



Trio Śląskie: these Polish musicians from the Katowice Radio Symphony Orchestra enjoy Reinecke's musical roller coaster

Trio Śląskie

Dux © DUX1219 (54' • DDD)



Fascinating to hear music by the German composer Carl Reinecke alongside that of the Dane Niels Gade (see page 45), given the extent to which the former's career tracked the latter's. Gade left his job as conductor of the Gewandhaus Orchestra in 1848, 12 years before Reinecke succeeded him. The German became head honcho at the Leipzig Conservatory after Gade had returned to Denmark. But it's Reinecke's music – not the Scandinavian's – that proves more direct, unpretentious and free of the dogmatic Germaniana that was swirling around Leipzig at the time.

Reinecke's love for wind and brass sonorities shines through all four of these delightful works. In the *Fantasy Pieces* for clarinet and piano might be seen Reinecke's musical world-view: direct, attractive melodies with a sense of folk-like joy that are strong enough to disguise any formal machinations (as in the final Canon).

Reinecke's music has a wonderful tendency to glow like Brahms's and Humperdinck's (both his juniors) but, as the informative booklet points out, a work such as the Nocturne in E flat for horn and piano looks back to Chopin in its clarity. The *Introduction and Allegro appassionato* for clarinet and piano is a stormy, changeable piece but the shifts in texture always convince.

The main course here is the quasi-symphonic Trio in B flat for clarinet, horn and piano. This is an imposing canvas whose driving unisons break out into entwined rhapsody. These Polish musicians from the Katowice Radio Symphony Orchestra listen intently to each other in all four works; in the final movement of the Trio they lean into all the curves, peaks, troughs and tumbles of Reinecke's musical roller coaster. So it's a shame – though not a prohibitive one – that the work's ending is inexplicably weak. **Andrew Mellor**

Schubert • Sibelius

Schubert String Quartet No 14,

'Death and the Maiden', D810

Sibelius String Quartet,

'Voces intimae', Op 56

Ehnes Quartet

Onyx © ONYX4163 (74' • DDD)



If there was one thing we learnt about the Ehnes Quartet from their debut recording

in 2014 – Shostakovich's Seventh and Eighth quartets alongside Khachaturian's Violin Concerto (7/14, with Ehnes as soloist with the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra and Mark Wigglesworth) – it was that they're not the types to fall back on traditional programming choices. This disc now sees them fill a programme all by themselves for the first time, and their pairing of these two quartets is a stroke of programming genius.

On a purely superficial level the recording stands out against the sea of *Death and the Maidens* partnered with either more Schubert, or Beethoven. More than that though, the parallels of genesis and sensibility between the Schubert and the Sibelius run surprisingly deep: both were written by composers living under the shadow of illness and death, both are characterised by sustained emotional intensity, and neither work was bestowed its title by its composer. In fact the starkest contrast between the two quartets is in their relative familiarity, the Sibelius's

comparative obscurity against the Schubert's superstar status. A recording that so compellingly presents *Intimate Voices* as a natural partner to *Death and the Maiden* is something worth hearing.

To home in first on the Schubert, despite this being a work that offers myriad interpretative possibilities, it is not a complete exaggeration to say that most performances tend to offer variations on a theme of grittiness. Here, however, we get something different; it is anguished, yes, but in place of rough-edged abandon we get a razor-sharp, perfectly blended precision that verily slices through the air. The *Andante* is equally grabbing for its organically spun long phrases, and a first-violin solo of heart-rending beauty and vulnerability.

The Ehnes Quartet's Sibelius tells a similar story of deep soul painted with a panoply of colours, dynamics and emotion, with a natural dramatic flow throughout. I never would have thought of putting these two works together, but in this group's hands it has resulted in something wonderful. **Charlotte Gardner**

Schulhoff

String Sextet, Op 45. Violin Sonata No 2.

Duo. Cinq Études de jazz

Spectrum Concerts Berlin / Frank S Dodge

Naxos 8 573525 (68' • DDD)

Schulhoff

'Complete Music for Violin and Piano'

Violin Sonatas^a - No 1; No 2. Suite^a.

Solo Violin Sonata

Bruno Monteiro *vn*^a **João Paulo Santos** *pf*

Brilliant Classics 95324 (77' • DDD)



Naxos provides a quality sampling from the creative prime of an extraordinarily gifted 20th-century Czech composer-pianist who died of tuberculosis in Wülzburg concentration camp in August 1942. Like his similarly ill-fated composer-compatriots Hans Krása and Gideon Klein, Erwin Schulhoff, a prize-winning pupil of Debussy, Reger and Steinbach, at least lived long enough to develop a voice of his own. The String Sextet, Op 45 (1924), opens to a gritty, gnarled *Allegro risoluto* before a mysterious, gently pulsing *Andante* sets in and, beyond a Burlesca (rather like surreal Dvořák), the work closes to a darkly intense *Molto adagio*.

The Second Violin Sonata of 1927, superbly played here by Boris Brovtsyn and pianist Eldar Nebolsin, holds fast to a troubled mood that lightens somewhat in the beautifully crafted Duo for violin and cello (1925), where Schulhoff brings his skills to bear for a work full of nuanced expression (the lovely *Andantino* slow movement) and colourful rhythms. Brovtsyn is here joined by the cellist Jens Peter Maintz for another memorable performance that exploits and explores the music's every changing hue. Nebolsin returns to round off the programme with the *Five Jazz Studies* of 1926, individual tributes to Zez Confrey (the recipient of two studies), Paul Whiteman, the ever-versatile Robert Stolz, whose gift, *Chanson*, more suits the cocktail lounge than the jazz dance floor, and the operetta composer Eduard Künneke, also the composer of a *Jazz Suite*. No praise is too high for Spectrum Concerts Berlin, who spare no effort in bringing Schulhoff freshly to life. In fact, you'd be hard pressed to find a more winning introduction to his output, which is also beautifully recorded.

Much as I would like to welcome the new Brilliant Classics CD that usefully features all of Schulhoff's music for violin and piano, Bruno Monteiro's effortful and sometimes insecure playing bars a recommendation for anyone other than the diehard completist. You only need compare him with Brovtsyn in the opening of the Second Sonata to establish the latter's fuller tone, firmer attack and more spirited approach. The Solo Sonata, which in terms of style rather recalls Martinů, sounds laboured and plodding, while the Regerian Suite and First Sonata only just pass muster: listen to 5'31" in the Sonata's first movement and Monteiro's technical limitations become painfully obvious. João Paulo Santos's piano-playing serves him well save for the very reverberant recording. Ten out of ten for effort, I'd say, but if you want Schulhoff handsomely presented, then it's the Naxos CD all the way. **Rob Cowan**

Wilde

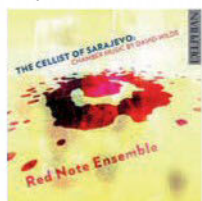
'The Cellist of Sarajevo'

Suite 'Cry, Bosnia-Herzegovina'. String Quartet

No 1. Piano Trio. A Prayer for Bosnia

Red Note Ensemble / Robert Irvine *vc*

Delphian 2 DCD34179 (84' • DDD)



David Wilde's list of achievements as a solo pianist spanning 50 years – from being

the winner of several major prizes during the 1960s to his critically acclaimed series of Chopin recordings for Delphian – has somewhat eclipsed his output as composer. A shame, since Wilde's creative contributions are of equal importance, as demonstrated in this two-disc set of his chamber music.

A one-time student of Nadia Boulanger, Wilde's music exudes technical assurance, craftsmanship and an in-depth understanding of instruments gained through his own experiences as a performer. The results are truly memorable when Wilde is compelled to respond to events of such magnitude and significance as the Bosnian war (1992-95). Wilde witnessed these horrors at first hand when he visited war-torn Sarajevo to support musicians who continued to defy Serbian bombardments by holding concerts in the city.

Although written before his visit, the intensely lyrical and deeply moving 'The Cellist of Sarajevo' – performed with just the right amount of passion and restraint here by Robert Irvine – remains Wilde's best-known work. It provides a fitting close to the final movement of the suite *Cry, Bosnia-Herzegovina*. Judging by the rest of the suite, Wilde's first-hand experiences of a city under siege were deeply troubling. The first movement sparks into agitated motion with gritty violin and punchy piano combining to form a frenetic, devilish death-dance, under which are heard dark strains of the *Dies irae*. The second movement comprises a highly dissonant chord relentlessly pounded out on the piano above a mournful melody on the violin. The third presents delicate piano chords over floating violin harmonics. The effect is sometimes like juxtaposing Messiaen's *Quartet for the End of Time* with George Crumb's *Black Angels*. But Wilde's lyrical voice – as heard in his solo cello lament and in the beautiful *A Prayer for Bosnia*, which closes the second disc – is very much his own: a musical voice that communicates with the immediacy and authenticity of direct, lived experience.

Pwyll ap Siôn

'Aspects'

Bruning Elegy Ginastera Danzas argentinas

No 2 **Henshall** Welsh Dance No 2

Houghton Opals Marin/Punch Brothers Flippen (The Flip)/Soon or Never

D Pritchard Stairs Rivera Cumba-Quin

Rossini L'italiana in Algeri - Sinfonia

A York Quiccan

Aquarelle Guitar Quartet

Chandos 10928 (57' • DDD)



As the Aquarelle Guitar Quartet point out in their booklet-note: 'As four

individuals with differing musical tastes, we have sought, over the years, to present to one another music from different genres that has inspired us... "Aspects" is therefore essentially a reflection of our career to date – a presentation of different aspects of the music that we love and that we perform in our concerts.' They add that it is 'both retrospective and prospective', with favourites they've been performing for years rubbing shoulders with brand new works that will form part of future concert programmes.

You could say that this superb UK guitar quartet's latest release starts with a bang and ends with a whisper, with former LA Guitar Quartet member Andrew York's nervy blaze of tone streams and syncopations *Quiccan* opening the programme and John Brunning's sweetly lachrymose *Elegy* for four guitars, commissioned for this album, bringing it to a gentle close. In between are works which together form a stylistically and dynamically rich offering, the perfect microcosm of which is Australian composer Phillip Houghton's three-movement *Opals*, which is by turns adamant, muscular, soft, sparkling, primal and fizzing with showers of aural sparks. There is wit and humour (Rossini); sobriety and reflection (Henshall); rough-hewn sophistication (Ginastera); punchy bluegrass (Marin/Punch Brothers); an explosive percussiveness (Rivera); and much else besides.

All is performed with that same customary blend of high-octane virtuosity, relaxed lyricism, tonal richness and perfection of ensemble which has made the Aquarelle Guitar Quartet not merely one of the world's leading guitar ensembles but, for sheer imagination and musicality, equal to the finest string quartet going.

William Yeoman

'Encores'

'As Performed by Mstislav Rostropovich'

Chopin Etude, Op 25 No 7 **Debussy** Clair

de lune. Minstrels. Nocturne et Scherzo

Popper Elfentanz, Op 39

Prokofiev Cinderella - Adagio; Waltz-Coda.

The Love for Three Oranges - March

Rachmaninov Oriental Dance, Op 2 No 2.

Vocalise, Op 34 No 14

Ravel Pièce en forme de habanera

Rostropovich Humoresque, Op 5. Moderato

Scriabin Etude, Op 8 No 11

Sinding Presto, Op 10 No 1

Stravinsky The Fairy's Kiss - Pas de deux.

Russian Maiden's Song

Alban Gerhardt vc **Markus Becker** pf

Hyperion © CDA68136 (70' • DDD)



Having released a hugely enjoyable Casals encores recording (Hyperion,

9/11), Alban Gerhardt is now back with Rostropovich encores. The first thing to say is that if you're assuming the two are similar enough in scope for the Rostropovich to be of little additional interest, then think again, because Gerhardt has rung the changes.

For starters, it's Markus Becker ably accompanying him this time, after Cécile Licad for the Casals. Then there's Gerhardt's approach to the project itself, because while with the Casals he simply selected 20 pieces which had appeared on Casals's own five encore discs, this one is as much a Rostropovich biography as it is a concert programme. He opens with the *Humoresque*, the extraordinary single breath of technical pyrotechnics Rostropovich composed as a birthday gift to his teacher Semyon Kozolupov. Then, the remainder of the programme's short pieces aim to display Rostropovich's tremendous range of musical tastes, from Prokofiev's strident March from *The Love for Three Oranges* through to the raindrop-like delicacy of Ravel's *Pièce en forme de habanera*. The booklet-notes consolidate this, discussing each piece within the context of Rostropovich's relationship with it and his career as a whole.

As a result, to explore the tracks on this recording is to explore Rostropovich himself, and Gerhardt's performances themselves approach this mission in different ways. Take the *Humoresque*, which, while every bit as direct and vital as on Rostropovich's recordings, sees Gerhardt mostly eschew Rostropovich's own deliberate roughness in favour of an equally grabbing fluttering, puck-like finesse. Listen to tracks such as Chopin's C sharp minor Étude or Rachmaninov's *Oriental Dance*, though, and you'll hear Gerhardt delivering more Russian darkness than he would ordinarily have gone for. All of which makes this a genuinely thoughtful and engaging tribute recital, and a compelling partner to the Casals.

Charlotte Gardner

'Venezia 1700'

Albinoni Violin Sonata, Op 4 No 5 **Bonporti**

Invenzione, Op 10 No 6 **Caldara** Ciaccona, Op 2

No 12. Violin Sonata, Op 2 No 7 **Dall'Abaco** Violin

Sonata, Op 4 No 12 **Torelli** Violin Sonata, GieT60

Vivaldi Trio Sonata, 'La follia', Op 1 No 12 RV63.

Violin Sonata, RV759

Les Accents / **Thibault Noally** v77

Aparté © AP128 (69' • DDD)



Les Accents, founded in 2014, is an ensemble devoted to vocal

and instrumental music of the 17th and 18th centuries. The players here comprise two violins, cello, harpsichord and theorbo. You might expect the programme to consist entirely of trio sonatas, but in fact five of the eight pieces are for violin and continuo. The disc opens with the 'world premiere recording' of a sonata by Torelli from Pisendel's manuscript collection in Dresden. Formed of two movements, each in several sections, it is (I would guess) the earliest piece here. The other works, including Vivaldi's Sonata, RV759, and *La follia*, all show their descent from Corelli.

The only other composer represented twice is Caldara, with two pieces from his set of trio sonatas published in 1699: a lively *Ciaccona* and a sonata. The latter begins with two slow movements, full of imitative writing, and concludes with a Sarabanda. It ends, as expected, with a cadence in the home key of C minor; whereas Bonporti's *Invenzione* in the same key surprises you with a *tierce de Picardie*. The slow, improvisatory first movement of the Bonporti is particularly striking.

Violinist Claire Sottovia makes an admirable foil to Thibault Noally, and the continuo players are splendid. But the disc really belongs to Noally, who exhibits expert double-stopping and elegant phrasing. His virtuoso account of the *Presto* in Albinoni's sonata will take your breath away; but for sheer beauty, with a lovely theorbo accompaniment from Romain Falik, try the songful Preludio of Vivaldi's B flat Sonata.

A first-rate disc, marred only by the translation of the booklet-note. Readers will be puzzled, for instance, by the reference to 'crotchets' and 'double crotchets' rather than quavers and semiquavers. There are other *bêtises*, but the music is the thing.

Richard Lawrence

Grace Bumbry

A tribute to the American soprano/mezzo who dreamt of becoming a Lieder singer then fell into opera. She turns 80 this month, and Jon Tolansky was recently lucky enough to meet her

‘Her recording of “Widmung” was an astonishing feat.’ EMI producer Suvi Raj Grubb singled out Grace Bumbry’s 1975 performance of Schumann’s Lied as a particularly special highlight in his autobiography *Music Makers on Record* (Hamish Hamilton: 1986), reminding us of the fact that this acclaimed dramatic singer-actress has been a master of song as well as of opera. In vocal supremacy and stylistic finesse, her challengingly compelling incarnations of mezzo and soprano roles as diverse as Norma, Medea, Amneris, Carmen, Chimène, Gioconda, Tosca and Salome, to name just a few, have been equally matched by her rapt poetic evocations of songs written by composers as varied as Schubert, Schumann, Berlioz, Brahms and Dvořák, not to mention her command in oratorio and other genres in works by Handel, Mozart, Verdi and Falla – for a start! ‘Widmung’ (from *Myrthen*) is indeed an ideal example of her sovereign vocal technique faultlessly channelling high artistic expressiveness as she flowingly invokes the ever changing subtleties in Schumann’s sound world, almost seamlessly transforming from rich elegance to intimate wonder as the second verse follows on – surely just as the composer intended. Unfortunately, that recording is no longer available, and I hope it may perhaps appear again before long as an important example of this great performer’s Lieder singing.

Ironically, the art form in which Bumbry has attained her most widespread fame had not attracted her fundamentally at the outset of her career in the late 1950s, as she told me very recently: ‘Quite candidly, it wasn’t what I was looking for. It was because of Lotte Lehmann in her masterclasses when she insisted I took part in the opera classes that I really discovered opera – and when I say she insisted, she really did insist. I had wanted to become a Lieder singer like Marian Anderson, but Lotte was sure I would sing opera, and after about six or seven months’ very hard work I got the hang of it. That only happened, though, when I realised that singing opera wasn’t about Grace Bumbry,

but it was about the particular role I was singing, and that was the entry for me into this wonderful world of opera.’

Like Anderson, Bumbry also made history as a pioneering African American artist, but this time it was in the opera house, when she made her debut singing Amneris (*Aida*) in Paris, in 1960. Her striking success catapulted her to international stardom and Amneris became one of her signature roles, preserved in the studios when EMI cast her

Her Amneris remains a classic example of the vividly penetrating characterisations that abounded in her performances

with Birgit Nilsson and Franco Corelli as Aida and Radames in 1966. To this day her portrayal of Amneris remains a classic example of the vividly penetrating characterisations that

abounded in her performances, which she sang with kaleidoscopic palettes of expressive colours that were yet contained within a rigorously controlled framework. A key to the dimension of characterisation was her searching textual curiosity, for instance with Amneris, of whom she said to me, ‘It’s my impression that Radames and Amneris might have had a fleeting romance, before he went to war with the Ethiopians and lost his heart to Aida, one of the captives.’ She underscores this by referring to Amneris’s words in the first scene of Act 2, when she is with her slaves in her boudoir and to herself sings ‘Ah! Vieni, vieni amor mio, ravnivami d’un caro accento ancor!’ (‘Ah! Come my love, revive in me again the dear words of love’). Amneris’s past with Radames is clarified, says Bumbry, ‘if we pay attention to the text, and do not get distracted by the beauty of the music and the voices.

The beauty of the music and the pageantry are so great that one can easily overlook important details.’ Indeed, details that vitally enhance our understanding of Amneris’s mindset in Bumbry’s hands.

Another signature role was Carmen. Many have felt that both in the Unitel film she made in 1967 with Herbert von Karajan conducting and directing and in her EMI audio recording (1969–70) – which has a remarkable dramatic theatricality for a studio performance – she ideally captured the vitally

DEFINING MOMENTS

•1953 – *Talent-spotted on American TV*

Aged 16, Bumbry sings Princess Eboli’s ‘O don fatale’ from Verdi’s *Don Carlos* on the CBS TV show *Arthur Godfrey’s Talent Scouts*.

•1955 – *Lessons with Lotte Lehmann*

First masterclass with Lotte Lehmann, who went on to teach her at the Music Academy of the West, Santa Barbara, California.

•1960 – *Opera debut in Paris*

She makes her professional debut at the Paris Opera, singing Amneris in Verdi’s *Aida* – and is internationally acclaimed.

•1961 – *Breaks down racial barriers in Germany*

Debut at Bayreuth Festival Theatre singing Venus in Wagner’s *Tannhäuser*. She is the first African American singer ever to sing a major role at Bayreuth – and she receives 42 curtain calls.

•1966 – *Carmen with Karajan*

Sings Carmen with Herbert von Karajan in Salzburg, followed by a studio film directed by him in 1967.



elusive complexity of Carmen that for me is often lacking in performances of this searing confrontational masterwork. I felt that Bumbry crucially projected not only the provocative pagan power, the seductive capricious enchantment, but also the strangely haunting, almost aesthetic mystery that in its dichotomy surely arouses the depth of erotic and emotional passion that overwhelms the unknowing Don José. This she evoked in her vocal colour, character and phrasing and in her sophisticated yet spontaneously suggestive acting – a Carmen both casual and profound: profound in her awareness of her destiny and, in uncompromising fidelity to Gypsy law, her resolve not to flinch from it. Watch the DVD in Act 3, just before the card scene, when she says to Don José that he will probably kill her

– her eyes and her voice are spine-chillingly still, and for me they encapsulate here the essence of this opera's truth.

If it was Lehmann who opened the door to operatic awareness for Bumbry, it is Bumbry today who is opening that door for the especially fortunate advanced students and young professionals who attend her Grace Bumbry Vocal and Opera Academy in Berlin (founded 2009). She cares deeply about the future of opera and devotes long spells of her time passing on her panoramic operatic experience to gifted young artists of the future. This and her legacy of recordings (DG is planning a nine-disc box-set to mark her 80th birthday) are indeed inspirational lights for opera's tomorrow. **G**

THE ESSENTIAL RECORDING



Bizet Carmen
Grace Bumbry *mez*
Jon Vickers *ten*
 Vienna Philharmonic
 Orchestra / Herbert
 von Karajan
 DG **DVD** (10/96)

Instrumental



Richard Wigmore welcomes a new Joseph Woelfl piano pilgrimage

'Riva's mellow sonorities, his contrapuntal clarity and sensitivity to harmonic colour, are often persuasive' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 59**



Harriet Smith listens to Daniel Barenboim's newly built piano

'This is a fascinating and wonderful instrument and DG's engineers have recorded it to best effect' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 61**

Beethoven

Piano Sonatas – No 4, Op 7; No 8, 'Pathétique', Op 13; No 30, Op 109; No 31, Op 110; No 32, Op 111

Paavali Jumppanen *pf*

Ondine ® ② ODE1298-2D (119' • DDD)



Early and late works make up the fifth and final volume of Paavali Jumppanen's

Beethoven sonata cycle. He brings a supple, pliable touch to Op 7's first movement, yet sometimes undermines its rollicking qualities with pauses between sections and downplayed *subito* dynamics. Conversely, Jumppanen plays up the *Largo*'s wide dynamic compass with mesmerising intensity; listen, for example, to the climactic build-up at the 3'25" mark. In the Scherzo, Jumppanen's gracefully dispatched outer sections contrast with his daring pedal effects in the *minore* Trio, while the pianist's attention to left-hand lines imbues the finale with a sharper than usual edge.

He unfolds the *Pathétique*'s *Grave* introduction at a daringly slow and steady pace. If the main body of the movement is not quite *Allegro di molto*, animation is still suggested by way of Jumppanen's clear lines and attention to accents. The central *Adagio* starts out slow and austere but eventually gains speed and flexibility, in contrast with Jumppanen's slightly square, held-back Rondo finale.

The rhapsodic *Vivace ma non troppo* of Op 109 is a model of sensitive phrasing and timing, in spite of Jumppanen's downplaying the climaxes (here Igor Levit and Paul Lewis give their all). The *Prestissimo* makes up in linear tension for what it lacks in fervency. I was surprised by much of the variation movement's detachment and reserve, compared to Jumppanen's far more fluent and involving live performance from the Isabella Stewart Gardiner Museum (available free online). Although more songful and mellifluous Op 110 interpretations grace the catalogue

(Angela Hewitt's, for example, among recent recordings – Hyperion, 9/15), Jumppanen's ability to clarify the busiest, thickest fugal writing without sacrificing tonal heft must be acknowledged.

In Op 111's first movement, Jumppanen revels in the transitional episodes' emotional ambiguity but his accurate yet notey execution of the rapid counterpoint doesn't match Pollini or Arrau for power and sheen. The pianist brings riveting breadth to the Arietta theme and the first variation but his slight speeding-up for the following two variations somehow breaks the spell. Towards the end, many pianists primarily focus on the long chains of trills, while Jumppanen gives equal and welcome due to the left hand's changing harmonies.

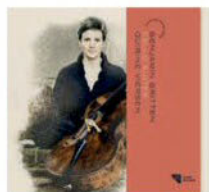
In sum, a superbly engineered and annotated conclusion to a Beethoven cycle characterised by occasional drawbacks and numerous strengths. **Jed Distler**

Britten

Three Cello Suites

Quirine Viersen *vc*

Globe Records ® GLO5259 (69' • DDD)



Evidence of Quirine Viersen's pedigree in period performance is inescapable in her

performance of Britten's three cello suites, written for Mstislav Rostropovich between 1964 and 1971. Her recording of the Bach Suites (2011) is a light and gentle reading, and similarly her bowing on this new disc is light enough to articulate the references to the Bach that are scattered through all three of Britten's suites – although nowhere more than in the First, and in particular in the Fuga, where those references are made readily discernible by Viersen without losing any subtlety. The direction also often flows towards the centre of her phrases, rather than the end: the implied (although not actual) presence of a Baroque bow is very firm, and as a

result the legacy of the Bach suites – to which Rostropovich was so devoted – is uppermost in this elegant recording.

The vastly differing technical demands of the three suites are such that the greater the calm of their performance, the easier it is to discern how utterly different they are, and the greater their resulting power. For that reason, the recordings of Philip Higham and Jamie Walton are still the best available; and although Viersen does not fall prey to over-expression, there is a certain restlessness to her performance of all three suites that means that they do not stand as clearly as discrete works as they ideally might. That said, although Viersen's lack of restraint prevents her from charting with sufficient clarity Britten's changing character as a composer over the condensed period of their composition, she does exercise a degree of control that is more than enough to make manifest their potency as great pieces of music. **Caroline Gill**

Selected comparisons:

Higham (3/13) (DELP) DCD34125

Walton (A/13) (SIGN) SIGCD336

Cavazzoni

Complete Organ Works

Ivana Valotti *org* with Gianluca Ferrarini *sgr*

Tactus ® ② TC510391 (146' • DDD)

Played on the Graziadio Antegnati organ of the Basilica di Santa Barbara, Mantua



Admirers of European keyboard music of the 16th century will welcome this

recording of Cavazzoni's complete organ works. The programme is a mixture of sacred pieces, based on plainchant melodies, and secular works which are mostly short *ricercars*. All these compositions may remind organists of the music of Tallis – a contemporary of Cavazzoni – and there are clear similarities between the two composers. The keyboard-writing is starting to progress



Paavali Jumppanen completes his Beethoven cycle with a mixture of early and late sonatas

from a purely vocal style towards more idiomatic figuration with florid decorative passages and rapid fingerwork. One can sense a clear lineage between Cavazzoni and Tallis and the next generation of composers, such as Byrd, Gibbons, Frescobaldi and Sweelinck.

Ivana Valotti's fine performances are characterised by lively articulation and extremely flexible tempos. She makes full use of the colourful and beautiful 12-stop 1565 Antegnati organ. Although freedom of tempo may be historically appropriate (and was advocated by Frescobaldi), some listeners may find Valotti's flexibility a little wearisome. Her phrasing is also rather crisp and clipped, giving the impression of breathless excitement. This would all work well on a harpsichord in a drier acoustic, but on an organ in a larger space steadier tempos and a calmer approach would be more satisfying.

The CDs are enhanced by the contribution of Gianluca Ferrarini, who sings the Gregorian melodies most expressively during the three Mass settings plus other pieces based on individual hymns. Aside from a few obvious edits, the recording is very good, and Valotti's detailed and informative booklet-notes add to the enjoyment. **Christopher Nickol**

Chopin

Ballade No 3, Op 47^a. Barcarolle, Op 63^b. Études^a: Op 10 - No 12; Op 25 - No 5. Four Mazurkas, Op 33^b. Nocturnes - No 17, Op 62 No 1^c; No 18, Op 62 No 2^b. Piano Sonata No 3, Op 58^b. Polonaises^d - No 5, Op 44; No 7, 'Polonaise-fantaisie', Op 61. Prelude No 25, Op 45^b. Rondo, Op 16^d. Waltz No 8, Op 64 No 3^d

Charles Richard-Hamelin *pf*

Fryderyk Chopin Institute ® ② NIFCCD617/18 (113' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Philharmonic Concert Hall, Warsaw, October ^a6, ^d11, ^b16 & ^c21, 2015



Charles Richard-Hamelin is the 27-year-old Quebec-born pianist who won

second prize at the Chopin Competition last year. Many apparently felt he was a shoo-in for first place, we are told, had not his concerto performance been disturbed by a bad case of nerves. Now the Fryderyk Chopin Institute has released a generous two-disc set, tracing Richard-Hamelin's progress through the first-, second- and third-stage auditions, as well his contribution to the winners' concert in October 2015. I can only echo what has

already been written about him. Richard-Hamelin is a supremely artistic, highly sensitive yet thoroughly masculine young pianist, whose strikingly original ideas remain true to the spirit of Chopin. For those of us not fortunate enough to have been in Warsaw for the concert, this release is probably the next best thing.

Perhaps the most perceptive interpretation of the lot is the *Polonaise-fantaisie*, easily among the most beautifully wrought and persuasive I've heard. No wandering in a trance-like vagueness here. This is a boldly conceived and powerful performance: robust music, not reminiscent of the dance but actually dancing and happy to be doing so. Naturally there is plenty of atmosphere, punctuated by pensive moments, but Richard-Hamelin's performance seems so forthright and inevitable, so self-evidently sane and musical, that one could almost imagine we've been listening to wrong-headed, or at least highly self-indulgent, readings for the past century and a half. This performance seems less a late masterpiece by a deathly ill composer than the work of a man who still relishes life.

The mighty F sharp minor Polonaise is fairly ablaze with intense patriotic fervour, though in the midst of this abandon,

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'Beautifully wrought and persuasive': Charles Richard-Hamelin plays Chopin

Richard-Hamelin strikes a secure balance between heart and intellect. Each section serves a unique function within the structure as a whole and the overall impression is lean and succinct. The far less familiar E flat major Rondo, Op 16, is played with panache and virtuoso abandon, and simply oozes charm. Each harmonic turn in the beautifully paced, eloquent C sharp minor Prelude, Op 45, registers surprise. The perfectly prepared cadenza unfolds with an acceleration that is far from precipitous, concluding with an understated aptness.

From the clarion peal of the B minor Sonata's opening notes, Richard-Hamelin holds us aloft in an unswerving trajectory from which we're not released until the last chord of the finale. His unerring sense of proportion is one of many factors that conspire to create a rare sense of cohesion. A fluent rubato enhances the rhetorical poise of thematic material – the lines always breathe and move – without unhinging the integrity of the overriding structure. The open, spacious vistas of the *Largo* are a sensual delight, and once we're launched on the fleet and foreboding *Presto non tanto*, there's nothing to do but hold on for dear life.

And there are Études, Nocturnes, Mazurkas, an A flat Ballade and a

Barcarolle to savour as well. The sound of the Yamaha on these live performance recordings is superbly captured. Richard-Hamelin has bold, original ideas about the music he plays, the emotional reservoirs to back them up and the technical equipment to convey them without distraction. Surely this is a young pianist of whom we will hear a great deal more, and very soon.

Patrick Rucker

Chopin • Schumann

Chopin Preludes, Op 28

Schumann Fantasie, Op 17

Horacio Gutiérrez *pf*

Bridge © BRIDGE9479 (66' • DDD)



The Cuban-born American-based pianist Horacio Gutiérrez has enjoyed a successful international career for more than four decades, yet he's made relatively few recordings compared with prominent contemporaries such as Murray Perahia, Garrick Ohlsson or Emanuel Ax. As this excellently engineered recital reveals, the 68-year-old Gutiérrez's glittering technique and extrovert, tasteful style

remain unambiguously intact throughout two Romantic-repertoire pillars.

The pianist must have been raring to go when he launched into Chopin's Preludes: just sample the third prelude's brisk, mega-secure left-hand runs, No 8's grand sweep and smart textural layering, the deft changes in articulation in No 19's difficult arpeggiated figures or No 12's rhythmic vitality. You won't find Moravec's cameo-like refinement, Argerich's angular intensity or the underrated Ashkenazy versions' strong sense of line, but the wealth of nuance and details of colour informing Gutiérrez's pianistically orientated conceptions bear increasingly satisfying scrutiny upon repeated hearings.

Similarly, one cannot fault Gutiérrez's pianistic sheen in the Schumann *Fantasie*, although he doesn't consistently plumb its harmonic riches, linear interrelationships and poetic stirrings. Take, for example, the pianist's rather mechanical shaping of the wonderfully asymmetric unison writing at around 1'42" in the first movement, or his matter-of-fact romp through the skittish syncopations at 7'12". Few dispatch the second-movement coda's notorious skips with Gutiérrez's powerful grasp, but I miss the deft contrapuntal contouring distinguishing interpretations so disparate

as those of Arrau, Kissin and Fiorentino (among my top-rated versions). And while his direct, uncluttered third movement is a corrective antidote to its indulgent antipodes, the softer passages lack, say, Kempff's shimmering delicacy, while the climax points are full-bodied and solid, yet not so ardent and inevitable as in Horowitz's great 1965 Carnegie Hall historic return. Still, the playing conveys stature and seasoned authority, as do Stephen Wigler's booklet-notes.

Jeff Distler

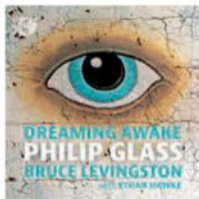
Glass

'Dreaming Awake'

Dreaming Awake. The Illusionist Suite – excs. Metamorphosis II. Piano Études – No 1; No 2; No 5; No 6; No 9; No 10; No 11; No 12; No 16; No 17. Wichita Vortex Sutra

Bruce Levingston *pf* **Ethan Hawke** *spkr*

Sono Luminus (M) ② DSL92205 (109' • DDD)



Bruce Levingston's close association with Philip Glass over the years has seen him

perform duets with the composer and produce solo piano arrangements of Glass's film music. The pianist's earlier 'Nightbreak' (3/12^{US}) was an imaginative attempt to combine the American minimalist with Liszt, Brahms and Rihm. Yet, while 'Dreaming Awake' focuses entirely on Glass, the spectre of 19th-century piano music continues to leave its mark on Levingston's performances.

Take the opening 10-bar phrase of Étude No 2. There are almost as many tempo changes here as there are measures. The phrase's subsequent repetition yields further unnecessary pushing and pulling. Rubato is not *verboten* in Glass any more than it is in Bach or Beethoven, but it can stifle the sense of forward momentum provided by the composer's trademark repeating cycles and patterns. The music's very *raison d'être* is undermined.

Levingston's adoption of over-cautious tempos results in a dream predisposed towards sleep rather than wakefulness. The lethargic *Metamorphosis II* and soporific Étude No 5 overstay their welcome. When Levingston allows the music to follow its own course, such as the well-paced Étude No 12 or *Wichita Vortex Sutra*, with its subtle shifts of colour, the results are far more convincing. The latter, which includes a brilliant reading of excerpts from Allen Ginsberg's stream-of-consciousness anti-war poem of the same name by Ethan Hawke, is highly

recommended. Hawke's Midwestern accent is more in keeping with the poem's location than Ginsberg's earlier version on 'Hydrogen Jukebox' (Nonesuch, 1/94).

Levingston's notes point out that Glass's Études 'raised the idea of a mere technical study to a highly expressive art form'. This may well be true; but for these studies to truly work, expression has to be combined with energy, brilliance and flashes of virtuosity. Other than the excellent *Wichita Vortex Sutra*, Levingston takes a 'safety first' option, and the music sometimes struggles to spark into life. **Pwyll ap Siôn**

Kagel • Susteck

Kagel Improvisation ajoutée. Rrrrrrr....

General Bass. Phantasie **Susteck** K-A-G-E-L

Dominik Susteck *org*

Wergo (F) WER7345-2 (73' • DDD)

Played on the organ of Kunst-Station Sankt Peter (St Peter's Jesuit Church), Cologne



This is a fascinating CD; we hear sounds from a pipe organ far removed from

the everyday world of choral services in churches and cathedrals. Forty or so years ago, such sounds were probably labelled 'experimental'; with hindsight, they seem much more a part of what was happening in music in the late 20th century. In *Rrrrrrr....*, some of the organ textures recall Messiaen, with their use of harmonic overtones and extreme high and low pitches. Kagel's compositional style is also akin to the music of Boulez, Cage, Ligeti and Stockhausen. In *Phantasie* he uses the device of combining live performance with recorded sounds – a mixture of man-made household objects and natural sounds. Meanwhile, in *Improvisation ajoutée*, a complementary sound world is created by the organist with two assistants manipulating unusual stop combinations and adding vocal interjections and body percussion.

As well as the varied musical influences, Kagel's music could be regarded as being a response to the constantly changing aural and visual world. His organ pieces are, on one level, the musical equivalent of the groundbreaking images seen on TVs, computers and in certain film genres, such as horror and sci-fi. Coming from the acoustic sounds of a large pipe organ in a resonant acoustic, these adventurous compositions make more of an impact than if they had been performed with purely electronic/digital means.

The CD also includes Dominik Susteck's imaginative improvisations *K-A-G-E-L*,

which are a worthy musical homage to such a stimulating composer. Much credit and gratitude should go to Susteck and his assistants; their skill and commitment make this a captivating and spellbinding experience. **Christopher Nickol**

Lourié

'Solo Piano Works'

Moritz Ernst *pf* with **Oskar Ansull** *narr*

Capriccio (S) ③ C5281 (3h 39' • DDD)



Interest in Arthur Lourié (1892-1966), the erstwhile Soviet music commissar who

defected to the West in 1922, seems to be gaining momentum. Before the 1917 Revolution he was identified with Blok, Akhmatova and other St Petersburg progressives. Recent attention, however, has focused on his connection in the late 1920s and early 1930s to Stravinsky, with whom he shared a relationship prefiguring that of Stravinsky and Robert Craft. Daniele Lombardi recorded some of Lourié's piano pieces in the mid-1990s and a number of pianists have followed suit, notably Marc-André Hamelin (Hyperion, 12/01) and Jenny Lin (Hänssler, A/14). Moritz Ernst, a young German pianist who has devoted significant energies to championing little-known music, has now recorded all of Lourié's piano music, spanning the years 1908 to 1938, three years before he abandoned Nazi-occupied Paris for Princeton, New Jersey, a move facilitated by Koussevitzky.

Lourié was clearly a musician who kept his ear to the ground for the latest compositional trends. He moves chameleon-like through a variety of styles with an alacrity that could only be accomplished with the securest grasp of his craft. One feels the influence of Scriabin in the earliest pieces, written while Lourié was a pupil of Glazunov at the St Petersburg Conservatory. In later works the influence of Schoenberg, Debussy and even Ornstein are apparent, though the *Petite suite* in F could be either an anticipation or an echo of Stravinsky's *Serenade in A*. The five pieces of *Tagesordnung* ('Daily Fare', 1915) have an unmistakably French air about them. *Piano in the Nursery* (1917) is a worthy and charmingly witty contribution to that rich vein of piano music already mined by Schumann in *Kinderszenen*, Debussy in *Children's Corner* and Bartók in *For Children*. The Third Sonatina and a Toccata are works one would like to hear at concerts.



William Youn with Tonmeister Eckhard Glauche recording Mozart piano sonatas

In general, this overview of Lourié's music for solo piano tends to bear out an idea now gaining credence, namely that Lourié, at least in some instances, anticipated rather than echoed Stravinsky. Ernst's sensitively artistic performances point up Lourié's remarkable diversity of expression, and make a compelling case for his music. **Patrick Rucker**

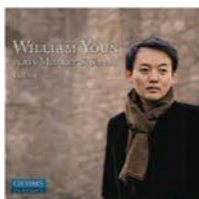
Mozart

'Piano Sonatas, Vol 4'

Piano Sonatas – No 3, K281; No 5, K283; No 13, K333; No 18, K576

William Youn *pf*

Oehms © OC1856 (79' • DDD)



William Youn is a pianist of great sensitivity, as previous reviewers of his

Mozart sonata cycle have noted (5/14). But more than that, he is a Mozartian of complete naturalness, which is no mean feat. He offers a beguiling reading of K281, its closing rondo given due playfulness.

He's notably gentle in the opening movement of the G major Sonata, K283,

in terms of both touch and tempo. That does, however, mean the contrasting octave passage is slightly undercharacterised compared to Uchida and Hamelin, both faster and suitably military-sounding in that passage. However, I have no argument with Youn's slow movement, which lets the music unfold with complete inevitability, Marc-André Hamelin sounding a tad self-conscious by comparison; in the finale, though, the French-Canadian's easy virtuosity is exquisite, alongside which Youn sounds a little more cautious.

Youn imbues K333's *Allegro* first movement with a pleasing lilt, though I find others more compelling as the music takes a darker turn in the development. Andreas Haefliger is particularly fine here, reacting with great agitation before good humour is restored. But Youn is once again eloquently poised in the *Andante cantabile* and his way with the finale, playful but with occasional darker undertones, is also finely done, though compared to Alfred Brendel's deliciously tart reading Youn's sounds just a tad uncomplicated. For my taste, K576's opening *Allegro* is a little too soft-edged – the dissonances in its first-movement development sounding a tad mild (Uchida really nails these), but

I like the exuberance of his finale, which is strong and self-confident. He gets the contrast between the extrovert and the tiptoeing elements compellingly, and the throwaway ending is just so.

Harriet Smith

Piano Sonatas – selected comparison:

Uchida (PHIL) 468 356-2PB5

K333 – selected comparisons:

Brendel (1/02) (PHIL) 468 048-2PH

Haefliger (SONY) SK46748

K283, 333 – selected comparison:

Hamelin (3/15) (HYPE) CDA68029

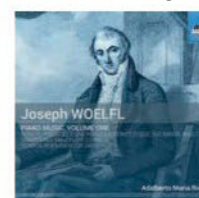
Woelfl

'Piano Music, Vol 1'

Piano Sonatas – Op 27 No 2; Op 38. Sonate, précédée d'une introduction et fugue, WoO113

Adalberto Maria Riva *pf*

Toccata Classics © TOCCO383 (73' • DDD)



At the turn of the 19th century the Viennese musical elite loved nothing more than a gladiatorial keyboard contest. One of the most celebrated took place in March 1799 between Beethoven – then at the

height of his powers as a virtuoso – and the Salzburg-born Joseph Woelfl (1773–1812), who had studied with Mozart's father and sister, possibly even with Wolfgang himself. The duel produced no obvious winner, though it highlighted the differences in style and aesthetics between the two men. While Beethoven's improvisations were praised for their brilliance and power, also their mystery and sometimes esoteric complexity, those of his equally famous younger rival came across as more pleasing and 'accessible', not least for the Mozartian 'ease, precision and clarity' with which he tossed off the most difficult passages. That Woelfl was deemed the more amenable personality goes without saying.

Writing in the booklet to this opening salvo in a projected Woelfl sonata series, Adalberto Maria Riva characterises the composer's style as lying 'somewhere between Clementi, Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven and Schubert', which certainly leaves the options open. Despite the odd tempestuous gesture in the C minor Sonata (WoO113) of c1804, there is little Beethovenian dynamism in these essentially amiable works, even if the finale of the B minor Sonata (Op 38) begins with what sounds like a tamed rerun of the finale of Beethoven's A minor Violin Sonata, Op 23. Clementi is evoked in some of Woelfl's keyboard sonorities, particularly his partiality to wiry two-part counterpoint. In several movements – say, in the *Adagio* of the B minor Sonata – the invention sounds elegantly 'Mozartian', though the tunes are less distinctive and Woelfl can meander where Mozart never does. Elsewhere, Woelfl's leisurely time frame and fondness for dipping casually into remote keys foreshadows Schubert. On a blind tasting, you might be forgiven for mistaking a songful A flat major episode in the finale of the C minor Sonata as an unknown Schubert Impromptu.

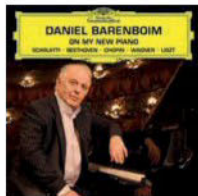
Riva plays this thoroughly agreeable music as affectionately as he writes about it. At times – above all in the C minor Sonata's *Allegro molto* and the first movement of the F major, Op 27 No 2, here yielding and ruminative to a fault – I craved a stronger sense of forward momentum. His ultra-flexible approach to tempo, enhanced by a fondness for separating left and right hands in lyrical music, can be slightly enervating. But the mellow sonorities Riva draws from his Bösendorfer, his contrapuntal clarity and sensitivity to harmonic colour, are often persuasive in music that typically lives by addition and varied repetition rather than cumulative growth, à la Beethoven. In

sum, a disc of gentle pleasures that whets the appetite for future issues in Riva's Woelfl pilgrimage.

Richard Wigmore

'On My New Piano'

Beethoven Variations on an Original Theme, WoO80 **Chopin** Ballade No 1, Op 23
Liszt *Funérailles*, S173 No 7. *Mephisto Waltz* No 1, 'Der Tanz in der Dorfschenke', S514.
Solemn March to the Holy Grail from *Parsifal* (Wagner), S450 **D Scarlatti** Keyboard Sonatas – Kk9; Kk159; Kk380
Daniel Barenboim *pf*
DG © 479 6724GH (68' • DDD)



A quick recap on the story behind Daniel Barenboim's new piano. It all began

with Liszt – when Barenboim went to play his restored grand in Siena he heard a sound he liked and began to dream about a piano combining the best of the modern instrument with the transparency and varied colouristic registers of the earlier one. That was as recently as 2011 but, this being Barenboim, he made it happen. The piano-builder Chris Maene worked with Steinway, who provided the components, and 18 months later, ta-da! What makes this piano different could fill a whole issue of *Gramophone*, but fundamental is the fact that it is straight-strung rather than diagonally strung. Barenboim is in love with it and this varied recital is designed to show exactly why.

We begin with Domenico Scarlatti – not a composer you'd necessarily associate with Barenboim but there's no doubting the conviction of his interpretations. He particularly enjoys the colouristic possibilities of Kk9, given with great gentleness, each trill duly relished. Kk380 is more controversial, taken at such a slow tempo that it becomes a reverie, its pingy martial elements lost in translation.

The opening theme of Beethoven's C minor Variations is striking – the transparency of the piano's lower register really comes into its own in this piece and accented chords never become edgy. There are many fine things as the variations unfold, not least the ghostly Var 9, while in the major-key sequence (Vars 12–16) he makes apparent their anticipation of Beethoven's late style. The deep left-hand chords of Var 18 are also particularly telling on this instrument. But where Beethoven demands *leggermente* fingerwork it can sound somewhat laboured, as do the left-hand triplets

in Var 20. The hushed writing in Var 23, on the other hand, possesses mystery without murkiness and the shadowy scales with which the final variation begins are also very effective.

I've never found Barenboim the most natural of Chopin players and here, despite some fine moments of filigree, the First Ballade suffers from a notably effortful coda. Wagner/Liszt on the other hand is right up his street and he brings a rare range of colour and an apt grandeur to the *Parsifal* March, also demonstrating how well the new instrument conveys huge chordal sonorities while retaining a warmth in the quietest passages. I have more reservations about the two Liszt pieces, though the many passages of *Funérailles* at the bottom of the keyboard have a rare clarity. But where the melody is set against a simple chordal accompaniment I find Barenboim less eloquent than the finest. And while he is telling in the many inward passages in the First *Mephisto Waltz*, streams of quiet notes given a billowing quality, I miss a heroic virtuosity in the more outlandish passages, the closing moments being a good case in point. But there's no question that this is a fascinating and wonderful instrument and DG's engineers have recorded it to the best effect. Harriet Smith

'Reflets et symétries'

Boumans Barcarolle No 3, Op 78
Brahms Piano Sonata No 1, Op 1
Ligeti Études – No 5, Arc-en-ciel; No 13, L'escalier du diable
Prokofiev Piano Sonata No 6, Op 82
Jean Muller *pf*
Soupir Editions © S242 (68' • DDD)



Jean Muller's new Soupir disc is a study in stylistic diversity, from the mid-19th-

century Romanticism of Brahms's First Sonata to Prokofiev's Sixth from 1940, two Études by György Ligeti from Books 1 and 2 (1985 and 1994 respectively), and the Third Barcarolle (2014) by Ivan Boumans, Muller's colleague on the faculty of the Luxembourg Conservatoire.

Muller is a refined musician and pianist, standing him in good stead for a sensitively lyrical reading of the Brahms C major Sonata. In the Prokofiev Sixth, on the other hand, Muller's rather contained and thoughtful performance, for all its admirable clarity, pays short shrift to the work's energy and, for lack of a better phrase, heroic brutality.



'Grace and tonal nuance': Kotaro Fukuma impresses in his very personal paean to water

The highlights are the two Ligeti Études, *Arc-en-ciel* and *L'escalier du diable*. Muller parses the rhythmic and harmonic complexities of these works with genuine acumen. The third of Boumans's Barcarolles, Op 78, creates a rich atmosphere redolent of Debussy and Fauré. The engineers have captured the naturalness of Muller's clean, unforced sound.

Patrick Rucker

'Sing to Water'

Baines *Tides* - The Lone Wreck

Bizet *Chants du Rhin* **Chopin** *Barcarolle*, Op 60

Kaski *Night by the Sea*, Op 34 No 1

Lyadov *Barcarolle*, Op 44 **Mendelssohn**

Venetianisches Gondellied, Op 30 No 6

Saint-Saëns/Godowsky *Carnaval des animaux* - Le cygne

Schubert/Liszt *Auf dem Wasser zu singen*, D774 (S558 No 2). *Die Forelle*, D550 (S563 No 6).

Liebesbotschaft, D957 No 1 (S560 No 10)

Schulz-Evler *Arabesque* on Themes from 'The Beautiful Blue Danube'

Sciarrino *Anamorfofi* **Smetana** *Má vlast* - *Vltava* (transcr Fukuma)

Kotaro Fukuma *pf*

Esprit du Piano © EDP02 (78' • DDD)



The Japanese pianist Kotaro Fukuma, now in his early thirties, begins

this impressive album with his own arrangement of Smetana's *Vltava*. For fellow transcription junkies, this on its own will be reason enough to shell out. Part of the pleasure of hearing this orchestral tone poem transferred to the keyboard with such aplomb is that one entirely forgets that this is not an original piano piece.

The same is true of the much-recorded Schulz-Evler *Blue Danube*. The raison d'être for this 'concert arabesque' is to charm and astonish – and there really is no point in entering this particular arena if you are not on the right wavelength (no pun intended). Overcook it, and the whole soufflé collapses. Fukuma's boldly projected account is despatched with a mischievous twinkle and can take its place alongside Bolet, Hamelin and (the ultimate accolade) Josef Lhévinne, whose

final octave bombardment on his (abridged) 1928 classic has been the envy of every pianist since. In between these comes the imaginative choice of Bizet's *Chants du Rhin* (Songs of the Rhine), a suite of six short pieces that reminds us of Bizet in his earlier incarnation as a virtuoso pianist and gifted melodist (No 6 is a real earworm).

After this, Fukuma abandons named rivers and, for the most part, unbridled virtuosity. The music takes on a more reflective mood with a nicely etched sequence of Mendelssohn, Chopin and Lyadov pieces (all in F sharp major or minor), progressing in a gradual decrescendo to Salvatore Sciarrino's witty and brief (1'44") *Anamorfofi* (Ravel meets Gene Kelly), Heino Kaski's lushly nostalgic *Night by the Sea*, 'L'épave solitaire' ('The Lone Wreck' from William Baines's *Tides*) and ending with Saint-Saëns's *The Swan* in Godowsky's arrangement. In this – and indeed throughout this disc – Fukuma shows that grace and tonal nuance are equally important constituents of his pianistic armoury as his impressive bravura credentials. **Jeremy Nicholas**

Lera Auerbach

Pwyll ap Siôn on a Russian-born American polymath whose striking music is inspired by dreams and haunted by other composers

In an age of multitasking habits, polymodal perceptions and multisensory experiences, we are all now expected to become polymaths. As Vinnie Mirchandani put it in his preface to *The New Polymath* (Wiley: 2010): '[We] can no longer be just one person but a collection of many.' But in trying to become too many people, what is lost? Identity, depth, talent? Genius, perhaps?

Lera Auerbach is a polymath in the original sense of the word – as defined and defended by Renaissance writers and thinkers; but she is also very much an artist of her time. Apart from being a successful composer and concert pianist, she's a painter, sculptor, librettist and author of several books of poetry and prose, but for Auerbach these extramusical activities are not exercises in dilettantism: all art forms are interconnected and designed to nourish and sustain each other.

'Innocent moments disclose the shadow of something far more unsettling lurking underneath'

Auerbach was born in 1973 in the Russian city of Chelyabinsk, which lies east of the Ural Mountains near the border with Siberia. Prodigiously talented, she studied the piano at the local Tchaikovsky music school, and having successfully participated in a number of national competitions, she was invited at the age of 17 to give a short tour in the US. The tour ended with a concert in New York City. This proved to be a turning point in Auerbach's life and career. She insisted on staying in New York instead of heading back home, immediately enrolling at the Manhattan School of Music and then at the Juilliard School, where she studied composition with Milton Babbitt and Robert Beaser. Other than a year spent in Germany at the Hanover University of Music, Drama and Media, she has remained in New York ever since.

Such a unique set of circumstances and outcomes has in turn given shape to a highly individual creative voice that, in Alex Ross's words, produces music of 'extraordinary power and intensity'. Auerbach has already amassed a sizeable corpus of works, including three symphonies, three violin concertos, a number of large-scale choral works, a three-act 'opera misteria', *Gogol* (2010), about the Russian novelist and dramatist Nikolai Gogol, and a series of highly successful ballet scores. However, it is in the area of chamber music that Auerbach has so far made the greatest and most lasting impression. Her chamber output includes eight string



Renaissance woman: composer, pianist, painter, sculptor, poet and librettist

quartets, three sonatas for violin and piano, a sonata for cello and piano, and two large-scale sets of preludes (24 each) for violin and cello respectively, with piano accompaniment. Her music for solo piano – often technically challenging but always highly idiomatic, and which has proved especially popular – also includes a set of 24 preludes, as well as the terse, epigrammatic *Ten Dreams* (both 1999).

The latter work serves as a useful introduction to Auerbach's colourful and vivid imagination – a world of extreme contrasts and sharp juxtapositions which often exploits wide registers while foregrounding pounding, obsessive repetitions of notes and chords. *Dreams* often provide the creative spark, with Auerbach once stating: 'I dream, then dissect the dream into sounds, translate the sounds into symbols, which can resurrect the dream.' These oneiric visions are sometimes bathed in a sound world of blurred sonorities and indistinct edges, but such innocent moments disclose the shadow of something far more unsettling lurking underneath. *Dreams* often flip into nightmares. The first of the *Ten Dreams* is even subtitled *Alptraumbaft* ('As in a Nightmare'). Each movement becomes a little study in semitone relationships – sometimes agitated, at other times more dreamlike.

Beethoven's shadow looms heavily in Auerbach's dark parody of his Fifth Symphony in the fifth dream, which is full of cluster chords and sharp chromatic shifts. The ninth, with its coruscating patterns, rushes headlong into the tenth, which announces itself with 48 very loud, rhythmic repetitions of an



AUERBACH FACTS

Born October 21, 1973, in Chelyabinsk, Russia.

Prodigy Began learning the piano at an early age, and started composing aged four. She completed an opera, *Snow Maiden's Gift*, at the age of 12.

Studies Manhattan School of Music; and Juilliard School with Milton Babbitt and Robert Beaser.

Breakthrough work 24 Preludes for piano (1999).

Other facts Named poet of the year 1996 by the International Pushkin Society, New York.

eight-note chord.

Beethoven is also the subject of another solo piano work, *Ludwigs Alptraum* ('Ludwig's Nightmare', 2007), which quotes and distorts fragments from the composer's Op 27 No 1 Sonata. Auerbach observes that in this piece, as in dreams, 'the most disjointed elements suddenly reveal connexions and seem to belong together in a strange and distorted reality'.

Dreams guide the mind against its own will. Auerbach's music also possesses a will of its own. She describes her music as


misbehaving: 'A composer does not own his sounds; the sounds own him.' Likewise, tonality is used not so much as a structurally binding agent but more in terms of its symbolic or psychological resonances, reinforcing the notion that Auerbach thinks of sound in terms of metaphors, images and stories. She points out that musical gestures become symbols in her String Quartet No 2 (*Primera luz*, 2005).

Auerbach's interest in dreams also extends to memories of childhood that are sometimes tinged with a bittersweet nostalgia. Parallels can be drawn between her 12 character pieces for piano *Images from Childhood* (2000) and earlier sets such as Schumann's *Kinderszenen*. However, Auerbach resists the urge to couch her language in an innocent and naive way. Instead, her music fluctuates from light and playful to dark and menacing, something that can also be heard in her ballet music, including John Neumeier's critically acclaimed 2005 adaptation of Hans Christian Andersen's popular story *The Little Mermaid*. Dancelike qualities come to the fore here, especially a penchant for waltz patterns and rhythms.

Musical reference and quotation plays an important role, but unlike its use in the polystylistic compositions of, say, Alfred Schnittke, it often serves as a unifying element in Auerbach's music, binding the material together. Sometimes another composer's presence is implied in the music's shapes and gestures, for example Bach in *par.ti.ta* (2007) for solo violin. At other times the reference is more explicit, such as in the *Sogno di Stabat mater* (2007) for solo violin and viola,

vibraphone and string orchestra (a reworking of the larger *Dialogues on Stabat mater*, 2005). The collage-like design of *Sogno* quotes brief passages from Pergolesi's *Stabat mater* before plunging headlong into dense chromatic vortexes. It's one of Auerbach's most direct and striking compositions.

Donald Rosenberg (*Gramophone*, 7/13) detects not only a 'mocking parody' of Mozart but also 'veiled or overt' references to Bach, Bartók, Offenbach and pop music in the 24 Preludes for cello and piano (1999); while Christoph Flamm has drawn parallels between Auerbach's E minor piano prelude (No 4 from 24 Preludes for piano, 1999) and Chopin's E minor Prelude, Op 28 No 4. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Russian composers including Mussorgsky, Scriabin, Rachmaninov, Shostakovich and Schnittke are often cited as influences, although a more general influence is Sofia Gubaidulina, who early on recognised Auerbach's talents as a composer. Auerbach's large-scale *Russian Requiem* (2007) engages with notions of diaspora, nostalgia and geographic and cultural dislocation.

Auerbach's use of quotation has inevitably drawn comparisons to polystylism and postmodernism, while the strong emotional and expressive vein that courses through much of her music suggests a neo-romantic approach. In truth, her music is neither. Nothing appears quite what it seems in Auerbach's world, and her aim is often to find beauty 'in the most unexpected places'. As violinist Gidon Kremer has said: 'Her strong talent...is nurtured by a deep respect towards the past, but still allows her creations to remain sincere and personal, while being innovative and adventurous.' 

A review of Lera Auerbach's ECM collaboration with viola-player Kim Kashkashian, 'Arcanum', will appear next month

LISTEN TO AUERBACH

Three recordings that open up her sound world

**'Preludes and Dreams'**

Lera Auerbach *pf*

BIS (A/06)

A number of recordings of Auerbach's solo piano music have been released over the years, including Ksenia Nosikova's 'Flight and Fire' (Profil, 2007) and Eli Kalman's excellent 'Homo Ludens' (Centaur, 2015). But the composer's own 'Preludes and Dreams' (BIS, 2006), featuring 24 Preludes, *Ten Dreams* and *Chorale, Fugue and Postlude*, remains the benchmark for all future interpretations.

**The Little Mermaid**

San Francisco Ballet Orchestra / Martin West

C Major

John Neumeier's powerful, poignant adaptation of Hans Christian Andersen's *The Little Mermaid* is brought to life by Auerbach's vivid and dramatic score, which ranges from muscular *Rite of Spring*-style moments to expansive filmlike themes, quotes from Beethoven, Prokofiev and Shostakovich, percussive sounds occasionally reminiscent of ceremonial Japanese Noh theatre and disembodied vocal sounds from a theremin.

**Sogno di Stabat mater**

Gidon Kremer *vn* Kremerata Baltica

Nonesuch (11/10)

Kremer teams up with Kremerata Baltica in Auerbach's highly imaginative reworking of Pergolesi's famous piece.

Vocal



Alexandra Coghlan on Marian music by Antonio Caladara:

'The astonishing 16-voice Crucifixus is an endless cycle of suspensions and harmonic shifts that eclipses even Lotti' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 65**



Jeremy Nicholas discovers Paderewski songs:

'I suspect I am not alone in being unaware of this additional string to Paderewski's bow' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 72**

Arnalds

Island Songs

Ólafur Arnalds and friends

Mercury (CD + DVD) 481 2857; (CD) 481 2861 (32' + 36' • DDD • NTSC • 16:9 • PCM stereo • O) DVD features films relating to the Island Songs project, directed by Baldvin Z



Island Songs follows on from a number of projects by Ólafur Arnalds, such as

Found Songs and *Living Room Songs* – both of which were composed and recorded within the space of one week – which have specific start and end points. Arnalds takes this idea a step further in *Island Songs*, bringing his music to seven locations spread out across his native Iceland over a period of seven weeks, hence the title. Allowing one week rather than one day per composition also gives Arnalds more creative breathing space to collaborate with different musicians in each one of the locations.

To get an immediate sense of what *Island Songs* is about, I'd recommend first watching the accompanying DVD, directed by Baldvin Zophoníasson. It starts off with a close-up of poet and one-time schoolteacher Einar Georg Einarsson reading a poem about a river and the musical sounds it makes. Arnalds's piano fades into the background with a gently rocking two-note figure reminiscent of Philip Glass. A melodic idea gradually emerges beneath the pattern. The poem ends and the sound of a string quartet rises to the surface, its shapes echoing Barber's *Adagio*.

It's an effective and powerful opening to an imaginative song-cycle, impressive both in its sonic variety and its creative depth. Arnalds is best known for his moody, brooding soundtrack to the crime drama series *Broadchurch* (for which he received a Bafta award), and tracks such as 'Öldurót' and 'Doria' are more immediately film-like in quality; but the most interesting tracks

are those which feature the South Iceland Chamber Choir in the Pärt-like 'Raddir' and the brass trio in 'Dalur'. Their contributions give a slightly rough hew to Arnalds's often smooth and polished musical surfaces, and confirm the composer's view that 'ultimately it is people rather than places that inspire music and art'. **Pwyll ap Siôn**

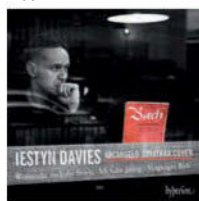
JS Bach

Cantatas – No 54, *Widerstehe doch der Sünde*^a; No 82, *Ich habe genug*^a; No 170, *Vergnügte Ruh*^a, *beliebte Seelenlust*^a; No 52 – *Sinfonia*; No 174 – *Sinfonia*

^aIestyn Davies *countertenor*

Arcangelo / Jonathan Cohen

Hyperion (CD) CDA68111 (65' • DDD • T/t)



The question is not if but when a distinguished countertenor decides

to record the Bach solo alto cantatas. The catalogue offers a remarkable range of individual vocal timbres which seem to influence interpretative parameters to a startling degree. One thinks of Alfred Deller's small, floating lines unveiling exquisite intimations in Cantatas Nos 54 and 170 (with the young Leonhardt and Harnoncourt and their future wives) testing the historical waters in the early 1950s (Vanguard). At the other extreme, Andreas Scholl projects his honeyed and flexible instrument with richly uncompromising projection (Harmonia Mundi, 5/98).

Iestyn Davies falls somewhere in between the two and yet he is no less distinctive in personality and musical ambition. Jonathan Cohen's invigorating direction of the top-notch Arcangelo and Davies's extraordinarily questing approach make for a happy balance between abstract delight and rhetorical flair. For example, in the centrepiece of No 170, 'Wie jammern' – a world turned upside down by Satan – disorientation is conveyed more by a plague-like itchiness than by the tendency

to over-emphasise the imagery. There are a few unsettled moments in No 170 and there have been more close-knit readings between singer and obligato organ, but the crystalline character here is original and affecting.

Cantata No 54 sits within the small surviving group of Weimar cantatas in which the voice, emblematically at least, sits as *primus inter pares* in the motet tradition of Bach's late-17th-century forebears. Davies and Cohen give little quarter to emotional indulgence, as can so often be the case. What ensues is a highly refined essay of beautifully articulated singing and playing; the forward-leaning tempo never appears frenetic, with the opening movement as resolute as Bach clearly intends.

The least well-known alto cantata, No 35, usually makes up the trio but Davies forsakes this and plumps for *Ich habe genug*. If ostensibly a celebrated bass cantata (which the composer reworked for soprano and flute), the transition to alto works astonishingly well, but only because the soloist is so exceptionally accomplished. 'Schlummert ein' with single strings is deeply moving, framed by the supple and poetic oboe-playing of Katharina Spreckelsen.

Two ruddy sinfonias – reworkings of the *Brandenburgs* – provide agreeably colourful and vivacious interludes. Yet the dominant virtue in this fine collaboration between the outstanding Davies and Arcangelo lies in an unsentimental perspicacity, reassuring in its intelligence and deep sensitivity.

Jonathan Freeman-Attwood

JS Bach • Buxtehude • Erlebach

'Sleepers Awake!'

JS Bach Cantata No 140, *Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme* **Buxtehude** *Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme* – BuxWV100; BuxWV101. *Quemadmodum desiderat cervus*, BuxWV92. *Sonata*, BuxWV266

Erlebach *Sonata* No 6

The Bach Players / Nicolette Moonen ^{v/n} Hyphen Press (CD) HPM010 (73' • DDD • T/t)



'Intelligence and deep sensitivity': Iestyn Davies with Arcangelo and Jonathan Cohen recording Bach cantatas at St Jude-on-the-Hill, London



The latest disc from The Bach Players, based as usual on one of their London concert programmes, brings together three cantata settings based on the chorale *Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme* – two by Buxtehude and Bach's familiar Cantata No 140. The opening Buxtehude, BuxWV101, is the grandest and jolliest but not the best, being somewhat repetitive in an unhurried and frankly rather irritating sort of way. BuxWV100 is better, featuring smoother and more lyrical writing, and (crucially) more variety.

The other Buxtehude cantata on the disc is the gem, however. *Quemadmodum desiderat cervus* is a chaconne on a two-bar theme heard 64 times, but manages over that to be subtly responsive to its text, Psalm 42, with its evocations of the hind, thirst, the water brook and visions of heavenly eternity. There is more Buxtehude on the disc in the form of one of his ensemble sonatas – always worth hearing – as well as another trio, a wispy one for piccolo violin gamba and continuo by the less well-known Philipp Heinrich

Erlebach. The trouble taken to procure a piccolo violin (from the Royal Academy of Music) was evidently prompted by the presence of the Bach cantata, a somewhat sensuous work which ends the disc in surpassing style.

The Bach Players, featuring many of London's most experienced Baroque instrumentalists, are an eminently competent outfit, perfectly equipped to reach for the right tempo, expressive outline and stylistic gesture. The one-to-a-part singers are an essentially younger group; soprano Rachel Elliott and alto Sally Bruce-Payne have a boyish tone which suits the music well, and combine firmly with tenor Samuel Boden and bass Jonathan Gunthorpe. In short, this is fine music in safe hands. My only real worry concerns the balance, in which the strings are distant compared to voices and the continuo – I can't quite work out what the thinking is behind that. **Lindsay Kemp**

Caldara

'Salve regina – Music for the Praise of Mary' Ave maris stella. Crucifixus. Haec est regina virginum. Laboravi in gemitu meo. Magnificat in D minor. Regina coeli laetare. Salve regina. Stabat mater. Suscepit Israel. Tenebrae factae sunt. Trio Sonata, Op 1 No 5

Berlin Vocal Academy; Bassano

Ensemble Berlin / Frank Markowitsch

Rondeau Produktion © ROP6118 (64' • DDD • T/t)



Antonio Caldara is best remembered today as a composer of opera. It's a genre absent from this new collection of Caldara's Marian music but one whose presence is constantly felt, whether in the unaccompanied polyphony of his *stile antico* anthems or the Baroque textures of his sacred cantatas. Textual drama is absolutely at the fore in a programme that follows the life of the Virgin Mary, from the Annunciation, celebrated in the innocent joy of the *Magnificat*, through to the mature maternal anguish of the *Stabat mater*.

That this collection includes three premiere recordings speaks of the neglect Caldara has suffered compared to his contemporaries Vivaldi and Alessandro Scarlatti. The works resurrected here – a vibrant, festal *Magnificat* for double choir and substantial instrumental ensemble, a charming little *Ave maris stella* for soprano and alto duet and continuo, and a more extended, episodic *Salve regina* for solo

tenor – are far from musical offcuts, though none quite equals the best here.

The astonishing 16-voice *Crucifixus* is an endless cycle of suspensions and unexpected harmonic shifts that eclipses even Lotti's iconic eight- and 10-voice settings – an ecstatic piece of proto-Romantic angst whose chiaroscuro of emotion is pure opera, even if the text and textures anchor it in the sacred. Unfortunately Frank Markowitsch's young singers treat it with a little too much precision and care. For every moment of beauty in Caldara's writing there is an equal and opposite chromatic clash or ripping of the harmonic seams, something the Vokalakademie Berlin fail to relish, losing the Italianate muscularity that this repertoire needs.

The largest work here – the 20-minute *Stabat mater* setting – fares better, supported by the instrumentalists of the Bassano Ensemble Berlin. It doesn't quite reach the emotional pitch of Domenico Scarlatti's 10-voice treatment but the sensitivity to text is telling, from the angular opening phrase, anticipating the hammering in of the Crucifixion nails – to the lyrical 'Iuxta crucem'. The recording by the Swiss-Italian Radio Chorus still remains the benchmark, however.

Alexandra Coghlan

Stabat mater – selected comparison:

Rad Svizzera Chor, Aura Musicale, Budapest, Clemencic (1/01) (NAXO) 8 554715

Danielpour

Songs of Solitude^a. *War Songs*^a.

Toward the Splendid City^b

^aThomas Hampson *bar* Nashville Symphony

Orchestra / Giancarlo Guerrero

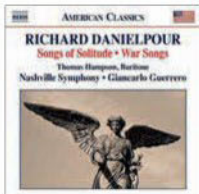
Naxos American Classics (M) 8 559772

(61' • DDD • T)

Recorded live at Laura Turner Concert Hall,

Schermerhorn Symphony Center, Nashville,

^aMarch 12-14, ^bNovember 20 & 21, 2015



Richard Danielpour composed *Songs of Solitude* (2002), on poems by Yeats, in the weeks following the September 11 attacks; *War Songs* (2008), on poems by Whitman, was inspired by photographs published in the *New York Times* of soldiers killed in the Iraq War. Despite the catastrophic nature of these catalysts, however, neither work displays sufficient musical intensity to amplify or even to suitably illuminate the potent imagery of the texts. More often than not, in fact, the music seems to mute the poetry's power.

'Drinking Song' in *Songs of Solitude* (a setting of the third and fourth stanzas of Yeats's 'Blood and the Moon'), for example, is rendered as a smirking, syncopated, Broadway-style number reminiscent of *West Side Story*. Danielpour writes brilliantly for orchestra, and his vocal writing respects the texts' metrical integrity, rendering every word intelligible. Here, though, Yeats's delicately balanced juxtaposition of earthly suffering and celestial purity is given over to tawdry ordinariness.

Danielpour's music is most compelling and communicative when at its most economical. 'These are the clouds', the fourth of the *Songs of Solitude*, begins with the baritone accompanied solely by tubular bells – a lovely, Brittenesque effect – until a soft carpet of strings slips in to underscore the poet's turning to address us as 'friend'.

Both of these cycles were written for Thomas Hampson, who sings them magnificently. At 60, his voice sounds as fresh as ever, and the baritone's musical intelligence and literary sensitivity make even the less successful of these songs worthy of study. Hampson's achievement is even more impressive given that the recordings were made in concert.

Giancarlo Guerrero is an able accompanist, and the Nashville Symphony play beautifully for him. The recording closes with a committed and polished performance of *Toward the Splendid City* (1992), Danielpour's rhythmically obsessive, oddly monochromatic portrait of New York City.

Andrew Farach-Colton

Durante

Requiem Mass in C minor^a.

Organ Concerto in B flat^b

^aAlexandra Kidgell, ^aKaty Hill *sops*

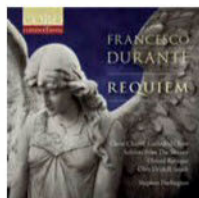
^aWilliam Purefoy *countertenor* ^aMark Dobell *ten*

^aBen Davies *bass* ^bClive Driskill-Smith *org*

Christ Church Cathedral Choir, Oxford;

Oxford Baroque / Stephen Darlington

Coro (F) COR16147 (63' • DDD • T/U)



Francesco Durante (1684-1755) made a profound mark on musical culture in early-18th-century Naples. His pupils at the city's prestigious conservatories included Pergolesi, Traetta, Piccinni and Paisiello. A renowned composer of sacred music, Durante wrote at least three Requiems; an elaborate setting in C minor dated 1746 was probably written for Rome's S Giacomo degli Spagnoli (in

the Piazza Navona) to commemorate the recently deceased Philip V of Spain. More than 50 manuscript copies are dotted around the world, some of them written out as late as 1871, but the work has never been published. It has been edited for this recording by Stephen Darlington, who praises the way Durante's music combines 'mastery of counterpoint with an elegance of melody, a richness of harmony and a structural instinct'.

Sometimes singing in five parts and elsewhere in eight, Christ Church Cathedral Choir are on superb form in this skilfully woven music. The assured boy choristers are balanced elegantly with the unforced ease of the adult lay clerks. Durante's string accompaniments are astutely varied and played by Oxford Baroque with perfect sincerity and stylistic finesse; an obvious dramatic trick is reeling downward spirals that insinuate hints of fire and brimstone in 'Dies irae' and 'Quid sum miser'. The only departure from economical orchestral scoring is a subtle pair of natural horns used to splendid effect in 'Tuba mirum', an attractive soprano aria sung limpidly by Alexandra Kidgell. The plaintive quintet of soloists (drawn from The Sixteen), anguished choral supplications and Oxford Baroque's players are articulately expressive in the vivid contrasts during 'Ingemisco tamquam reus'. The suspension-laden passages for solo voices in 'Lacrimosa', unfurling choral lines in 'Benedictus' and imaginative harmonic twists in 'Libera me' all reveal hints of why the 18th-century music historian Charles Burney acclaimed Durante as the greatest harmonist of his time. **David Vickers**

Gombert

'Motets II'

Ave Maria. Beatus vir. Conceptio tua. Da pacem Domine. Ego flos campi. Ego sum qui sum. Hodie nata est. Hortus conclusus est. In te Domine speravi. Media vita. Ne reminiscaris. Pater noster. O Domine Jesu Christe. O Rex Gloriarum. Patefactae sunt. Respice Domine. Suscipe verbum

Beauty Farm

Fra Bernardo (M) (2) FB1612457 (108' • DDD • T)



This double album of motets by Nicolas Gombert (c1495-1560) from the vocal ensemble Beauty Farm is their second release, offering several more first recordings and adding considerably to our picture of this intriguing Renaissance



The Bach Players recording Bach and Buxtehude in St Michael's Church, Highgate

composer. A small change of personnel since their previous album leads to a richer, denser sound. This feels like a calculated move, since Jorge Martín's booklet-notes refer to a famous passage in *Practica musica* (1556) by the theorist Hermann Finck where Gombert's style is described as innovative because it 'avoids pauses, and his work is rich with full harmonies and imitative counterpoint'.

Finck's description serves, I would suggest, as a summation of both Gombert's style and Beauty Farm's performance. Qualities which I previously related to the Hilliard Ensemble and admired afresh in Beauty Farm – 'never hurrying, never obviously cadencing' – are amplified on this new album, in which one feels as if great slabs of rich, dense polyphony are served up with relish. Richness and density can, however, loom too large at times, as occasionally Beauty Farm deny Gombert's polyphony a sense of spaciousness. This tends to happen through relatively brief final chords and is then further condensed by short gaps between the motets themselves, and occasionally the motet-halves. On disc 2, *Suscipe verbum* barely ceases resounding before *In te Domine speravi* arrives all too soon to create an awkward junction.

Yet there is so much to enjoy on this album, especially from the spicy harmonic twists of *Hortus conclusus*, previously recorded at higher pitch by the Brabant Ensemble (Hyperion, A/07). This track demonstrates what is rapidly becoming the trademark style of Beauty Farm: an extremely rich, treacily sound from lower voices whose carefully cultivated homogeneity sublimates dissonance. To this end, there is a superb rendition of *Media vita* which alone is worth the album price.

Edward Breen

Gubaidulina


Jauchzt vor Gott^a. Hell und dunkel^b.

Sonnengesang^c

^{ac}North German Radio Choir / Philipp Ahmann

with ^aIvan Monighetti vc ^{ab}Christian Schmitt org

^cElbtonal Percussion

BIS  BIS2276 (62' • DDD/DSD • T/I)

^cRecorded live at the Rolf Liebermann Studio, Hamburg, October 30, 2011



Gubaidulina's substantial *Sonnengesang* ('The Canticle of the Sun')

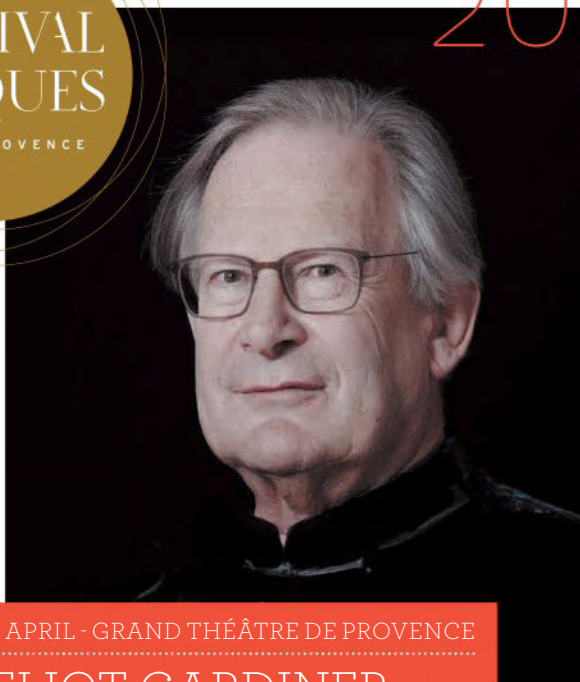
was written for Mstislav Rostropovich on his 70th birthday, and the dedicatee recorded it in 1999. It might be described as a meditation on the famous poem by St Francis of Assisi; the choir has a very significant role but the work is not a setting of the words as such. It is music of great transparency and delicacy, and is also enormously demanding for the cellist, but one could hardly wish for a better soloist than Ivan Monighetti. It is in many ways almost impossible to choose between the various versions now available, and it may simply come down to couplings. Rostropovich's recording comes with *Music for Flute, Strings and Percussion*, Geringas's with the remarkable *Hommage à Marina Tsvetayeva*, Wispelwey's with *In croce* and the somewhat unsatisfactory Preludes for solo cello, and Altstaedt's with the fine violin concerto *The Lyre of Orpheus*. However, Monighetti's performance, as captured in NDR's excellent recording, is unusually present, as is the choir, thus making every detail audible, and I feel that it has an unusual immediacy.

As for couplings, we have a jubilant first recording of the psalm-setting *Jauchzt vor Gott* and the organ solo *Hell und Dunkel*, both of which exult in typically Gubaidulinian massive contrasts of texture



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and volume, and the three works form a highly satisfactory programme. Ahmann's direction is spot-on, and the choir acquit themselves splendidly. Praise too for organist Christian Schmitt, who clearly enjoys the composer's idiosyncratic organ-writing to the full. An outstanding disc.

Ivan Moody

Sonnengesang – comparative versions:

Rostropovich, London Voices, Numajiri

(9/01) (EMI/WARN) 557153-2

Geringas, Danish Nat Ch, Parkman

(2/04) (CHAN) CHAN10106

Wispekwey, Collegium Vocale, Reuss

(11/04) (CHNN) CCSSA20904

Altstaedt, Kamer Chbr Cb, Sirmas

(5/12) (ECM) 476 4662

Handel · Mozart · Vivaldi

Handel Dixit Dominus, HWV232 **Mozart** Dixit et Magnificat, K193 **Vivaldi** Dixit Dominus, RV595

Marta Mathéu, Marta Bayodi-Hirt *sops* **Anthony**

Roth Costanzo *countertenor* **Makoto Sakurada** *ten*

Furio Zanasi *bass* **La Capella Reial de Catalunya;**

Le Concert des Nations / Jordi Savall

Alia Vox (F) (S) AVSA9918 (69' • DDD/DSD • T/t)

Recorded live at L'Auditori de Barcelona,

June 1, 2015



An unusual coupling, this, reflecting the fact that the recording comes from a concert,

given in the Auditori in Barcelona. The ordering, too, is more 'concert' than 'disc', with the star piece – Handel's dazzling *Dixit Dominus* – at the end rather than up at the front. Still, it's interesting to be able to compare these versions of the much-set psalm, despite the fact that (or perhaps especially as) it's unlikely that any of the composers involved could have known the others' settings. Vivaldi's is one of two that he made, and though it borrows some of its music from other composers, it is typically and brightly Vivaldian, its most striking moments being a portentous solo trumpet to evoke the Last Judgement, and gently trickling strings for 'He will drink of the torrent'. Mozart's much shorter teenage setting comes with a similar-length *Magnificat*, and is somewhat conventional and functional, albeit with a joyful trumpet-and-drum feel.

The performances of all three pieces have an overall character that contrasts with the tendency these days for hard-driven interpretations, especially in the Handel. Thus it is refreshing to find Handel's 'Dominus a dextris tuis' allowed to build a grand *crescendo* towards its end instead of hurtling wildly towards the

brink, or for the countertenor solo 'Virgam virtutis' – sometimes rather rudely dashed off – given time and shape. Yet while it is also nice that the tumultuous final 'Gloria Patri' can work its magic without turning into a shouting match, there is a general low energy across the disc that I suspect will frustrate many listeners. This is largely due to the sound balance, in which soloists and chorus are somewhat recessed against a bass-heavy orchestra, but the choir of 20 also seem to suffer moments of underprojection that come across as almost timid. An individualistic and essentially musical approach then, as one might expect from Savall, but not necessarily one to live with. **Lindsay Kemp**

Handel

Messiah, HWV56 (new concert

edition by Sir Andrew Davis)

Erin Wall *sop* **Elizabeth DeShong** *mez*

Andrew Staples *ten* **John Relyea** *bass*

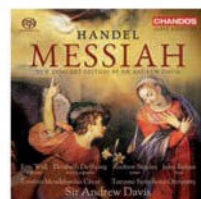
Toronto Mendelssohn Choir; Toronto

Symphony Orchestra / Sir Andrew Davis

Chandos (F) (2) (S) CHSA5176 (114' • DDD/DSD • T)

Recorded live at Roy Thomson Hall, Toronto,

December 2015



This is Andrew Davis's second recording of *Messiah*. His first, made in 1986 for

EMI (also with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra and Mendelssohn Choir), was unusual for its alternation between Handel's original scoring and the augmented orchestration of Ebenezer Prout's Victorianised 1902 edition. Interpretatively, too, Davis steered a middle course between old-school grandeur and modern sleekness.

Here, Davis gives us his own edition. 'My aim was to keep Handel's notes, harmonies and style intact', he writes, 'but to make use of all the colours available from the modern symphony orchestra in order to underline the mood and meaning of the individual movements.' Some of his editorial choices are bold and many are imaginative – though a far cry from Eugene Goossens's famously extravagant reorchestration, commissioned (and vividly recorded) by Thomas Beecham in 1959 (RCA, 5/60). Davis sets the first part of the Overture for winds and brass rather than strings, for instance, and his scoring made me think of Holst's suites for military band. 'I know that my redeemer liveth' features a prominent part for solo clarinet that transports Handel's sound world closer Mozart's or even Richard Strauss's.

More often, though, Davis's intention seems to be embellishment rather than reimagining. Note the snare drum punctuation in 'Thus saith the Lord'; cymbal rolls in 'But who may abide?'; sprinklings of pizzicato strings in 'O thou that tellest good tidings to Zion' and 'His yoke is easy'; and the ghostly shadow of a marimba in 'How beautiful are the feet'. The trouble is that sometimes even these relatively subtle decorations prove to be distractions rather than enhancements. As pretty as the glittering xylophone is in 'For unto us a child is born' and 'All we like sheep have gone astray', for example, such trimmings give off the faint but distinct air of a Christmas 'pops' concert.

Setting aside the textual emendations, this new interpretation is not all that different from its predecessor. Davis's conception of *Messiah* isn't particularly dramatic or even all that grand, compared with, say, Sargent (EMI) or Ormandy (Sony). Rather, I'd characterise it as gentle and sweetly affectionate, with an odd balance of sincerity and emotional reserve.

Tenor Andrew Staples and mezzo-soprano Elizabeth DeShong are both superb, dramatically alert and technically fluent. John Relyea is compelling, too, despite his singing flat at times and the now papery quality of his once formidable tone. Erin Wall is a fine soprano but sounds ungainly here, smudging her runs and weighing down phrases that should soar. The Toronto Mendelssohn Choir sound slightly less secure than on their older EMI recording, with some noticeable glitches in intonation and ensemble. The orchestra, however, do a terrific job realising Davis's flights of fancy.

This is obviously not a 'basic library' *Messiah* but can be cautiously recommended as a curiosity for those who enjoy arrangements and transcriptions.

Andrew Farach-Colton

Handel

Susanna, HWV66

Emily Fons, Ciara Hendrick *mezs* **Christopher**

Lowrey *countertenor* **Colin Balzer** *ten* **Raimund Nolte**

bass-bar **Andreas Pruys** *bass* **NDR Choir; Göttingen**

Festival Orchestra / Laurence Cummings

Accent (M) (3) ACC26406 (3h 4' • DDD • T/t)

Recorded live at the Göttingen International

Handel Festival, May 5, 2016



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'A valuable new perspective on Handel's late masterpiece': Laurence Cummings's live recording of *Susanna* from the Göttingen International Handel Festival

the establishment make sexual advances to Susanna when she is about to bathe in a stream. Rejected by the virtuous newly wed heroine (whose husband Joacim is away on business for a week), they vengefully accuse her of adultery. Just when the trumped-up charge appears to be leading inexorably to the innocent heroine's execution, she is defended by the young Daniel, who discerns and exposes the lies of the spiteful perverts (who are themselves sentenced to death).

This live recording, made at the Göttingen Handel Festival, is conducted sagely by Laurence Cummings, whose direction is alert to the broad range of dramatic atmospheres, situations, characterisations and musical styles in the oratorio. Each strand in the ominous Overture is delineated transparently by the Göttingen Festival Orchestra. The NDR Choir are for the most part adroitly disciplined, although the undernourished tenor line seldom projects essential contrapuntal details, and on occasion unbridled sopranos and basses pull the precision of textures apart. A few missteps from the generally excellent cast can be attributed to the heat of the moment inevitable (perhaps even

desirable) in a flesh-and-blood live concert performance that lacks the luxury of measured reconsideration and studio retakes.

Emily Fons's wayward embellishments inject unwelcome bulginess into Susanna's blissful pastoral 'Crystal streams in murmur flowing' (the murmured exchange of trills between the first and second violins are breathtaking), and heavy-handed over-ornamentation hinders 'If guiltless blood be your intent'; however, Fons's unadorned and emotionally bare singing in 'Faith displays her rosy wing' captures a truthful simplicity that reaches the dramatic kernel of the condemned victim's situation, and her vivacious coloratura in the heroine's giddy vindication 'Guilt trembling spoke my doom' is spot-on. Christopher Lowrey's supple technique, artistry and embellishments are responsive to gleefully scampering orchestral violins and crisp basso continuo-playing in Joacim's 'When first I saw my lovely maid', and his virile pinpoint coloratura is both ardent and intelligently musical ('On the rapid whirlwind's wing'). Lowrey and Fons excel in their duets; their lilting semiquavers moving in thirds peal perfectly in 'When thou art nigh'.

Colin Balzer sings with unforced clarity, excellent diction and exemplary embellishment as the First Elder, whose complaint about 'Tyrannic love' is confirmed as one of Handel's most ingenious accompanied recitatives. Raimund Nolte's thunderous Second Elder lacks the mocking humour that Handel implies (at first), and his Germanic pronunciation sticks out like a sore thumb; doubling up as Susanna's father Chelsias, Nolte sings the extrovert trumpet aria 'Raise your voice to sounds of joy' with aplomb. Ciara Hendrick sings the Attendant's little songs in Act 1 with graceful shapeliness; she reappears in Act 3 as the young Daniel, whose response to the sneering Second Elder is brilliantly interpreted with witty sarcasm ('Tis not age's sullen face').

The booklet contains an illuminating essay by Wolfgang Sandberger and reproduces several paintings depicting the lecherous elders spying on the bathing Susanna (Guercino, Jan Massys, Tintoretto, Guido Reni and Rembrandt). Notwithstanding a few reservations, this is a valuable new perspective on Handel's late masterpiece.

David Vickers

Jommelli

Cantatas – E quando sarà mai che alle mie pene;
Giusti numi (Didone abbandonata); Partir
conviene! Addio; Perdono amata Nice (Gelosia)

Barbara Kusa *sop* Lenka Torgersen, Cecilie
Valter *vns* Andreas Torgersen *va* Ilze Grudule *vc*
Alena Hönigová *hpd/dir*

Koramant © KR14002 (66' • DDD • T/t)



Niccolò Jommelli is one of those figures who loomed large in the 18th century –

in 1770 Charles Burney put him second in his list of favourite living Italian opera composers, behind Hasse but ahead of 'Galuppi, Piccinni, Sacchini, etc' – but is largely absent from the modern-day recording catalogues. Like many Neapolitan composers he played a significant role in creating the vocal style of early Classical opera, but 16 years in Stuttgart also lent his music a Germanic robust construction and richness of texture that were influential in the formulation of the European Classical style as a whole.

Some of his more than 80 operas have been recorded, but few of his chamber cantatas for soprano, strings and continuo. Not surprisingly, his operatic skills are on show in the form of expertly composed arias full of graceful and grateful vocal melody, as well as in flexible and dramatically developing accompanied recitatives – for instance the one in *Perdono amata Nice*, in which accelerating and uncontrollable darts of jealousy afflict a character seeing his beloved flirting, or the point in *Giusti numi* where recitative breaks briefly into arioso. The latter is one of two cantatas depicting the abandoned Queen Dido, but some listeners may feel that the subject demands something a little more emotionally wracked than the 18th-century poise Jommelli gives us here.

The Argentinian soprano Barbara Kusa has a light voice, technically comfortable and well matched in scale to the elegant-playing single strings. She does not display a great range of colour, however, and neither is she especially dramatic, with some of her recitative-singing one-paced and low on expressive enunciation of text. Mind you, it doesn't help that the church acoustic has a distancing effect and rather hollows out the sound. A reasonably well done disc of interest to students of the 18th century, perhaps, but maybe not one to grab the general listener.

Lindsay Kemp

Mahler

Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen^a.

Das Lied von der Erde^b (both arr Schoenberg)

^bSusan Platts *mez* ^bCharles Reid *ten* ^aRoderick

Williams *bar* Attacca Quartet; Virginia Arts

Festival Chamber Players / JoAnn Falletta

Naxos © 8 573536 (81' • DDD • T/t)



Recordings of Schoenberg's chamber arrangements of Mahler have

proliferated of late and this latest version from the Virginia Arts Festival consequently forms part of an already substantial discography. You may find yourself in two minds about it. First, there are the arrangements themselves. While some would argue that *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen* gains intimacy from the reduction, scaling down *Das Lied von der Erde* all but undermines a work that deals with isolation by pitting solo performers, vocal and instrumental, against the collective weight of a sizeable orchestra.

Secondly, the singing here is variable in quality. Roderick Williams is, as one might expect, superb in *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen*, his tone easily produced, his attention to textual detail immaculate, even in the most high-lying passages. The chamber version of *Das Lied von der Erde* offers opportunities for singers who might find the original taxing, to offer new interpretative insights, though Falletta's casting is in many ways conventional. Contralto Susan Platts sings with hieratic dignity throughout, and does exquisite things at 'Die müden Menschen geh'n heimwärts' in the 'Abschied'. Charles Reid, however, is very much the full-throttle Heldentenor, and can be ungainly. You may prefer Douglas Boyd's Manchester Camerata recording, which is sung with far greater detail and consistency.

Falletta conducts with admirable refinement and passion, though, and as on her Virginia recording of Stravinsky's *Soldiers Tale* (Naxos, 5/16), the playing is extremely fine, with a real sense of give and take between the instrumentalists. Solo strings make 'Der Einsame im Herbst' more wintry than autumnal, though the Attacca Quartet sound creepily effective here. The woodwind are particularly beautiful and poised.

Tim Ashley

Das Lied von der Erde – selected comparison:

Irwin, Weds, Manchester Camerata, Boyd

(10/11) (AVIE) AV2195

Paderewski

Four Lieder, Op 7. Six Lieder, Op 18. Twelve

Mélodies, Op 22. Lily of the Valley (Konwalijka),
Op 7a. Dans la forêt

Anna Radziejewska *mez* Karol Kozłowski *ten*

Agnieszka Hoszowska-Jabłońska *pf*

Dux © DUX1246 (61' • DDD • T/t)



In whatever role one defines Ignacy Jan Paderewski – charismatic pianist,

Polish patriot, 'a fairly good composer' (as the booklet-note describes him) or statesman – it is unlikely that the role of song-writer would spring to mind. I suspect I am not alone in being unaware of this additional string to his bow. That said, despite the quality of this recording, the artistry of the two singers and their ardent advocacy, I shan't be phoning friends urging them to acquaint themselves at the earliest opportunity with a treasure house of vocal delights.

Paderewski's complete songs (22 separate titles from three collections, plus the single 'Konwalijka' ('Lily of the Valley') and 'Dans la forêt' were written between 1882, the year after the tragic early death of his first wife, and 1903, when he was a global superstar and one of the most famous men on the planet. The Four Songs, Op 7, and 'Konwalijka', Op 7a, are settings of poems by Adam Asnyk; the Six Songs, Op 18, use poems by Adam Mickiewicz (Polish and English translations are provided). 'Dans la forêt' and the Twelve Songs, Op 22, have words by Théophile Gautier and Catulle Mendès respectively (French and Polish translations only are provided).

The general mood is disposed towards the sombre and gloomy with – surprisingly from the composer of so many attractive short piano works – few melodies that stick in the memory. But there are several rewarding gems to be cherry-picked, among them 'Siwy koniu' ('To my faithful steed') from Op 7, 'Konwalijka' and 'Tylem wytrwał' ('So much I've suffered') from Op 18. Vocal honours are divided between the expressive lyric tenor of Karol Kozłowski and mezzo Anna Radziejewska, whose firm intonation and sensitivity to the texts are somewhat compromised by her *messa di voce*, which, used unsparingly, is the vocal equivalent of squeezing toothpaste. Agnieszka Hoszowska-Jabłońska plays her role admirably in presenting this little-known corner of a great musician's output in the best possible light.

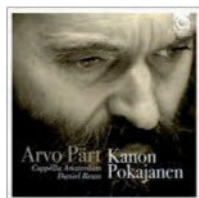
Jeremy Nicholas

Pärt

Kanon Pokajenen

Cappella Amsterdam / Daniel Reuss

Harmonia Mundi © HMC90 5274 (60' • DDD • T/t)



Premiered in Cologne in 1998, *Kanon*

Pokajenen for a cappella choir is one of Pärt's

most uncompromising and austere works. It is also one of his most challenging. Each singer is required to sustain perfect intonation across the work's 90-minute span while attending to the microscopic subtleties and nuances of the text. The text itself – St Andrew of Crete's canon of repentance – exerted such a profound impression on Pärt that it took him two years to complete the work, which comprises eight Odes, two shorter hymns ('Kontakion' and 'Ikos', heard around the midway point), and concludes with a setting of the 'Prayer after the Canon'.

Ode 1 sets out the work's main musical ideas: first, a series of strident chords oscillating between tonic and dominant; second, a pulsing, hocket-like idea supported by pedal bass; third, low tenors and basses singing lines that yield darker semitonal clashes; fourth, a more expansive, lyrical melody, harmonised in thirds between sopranos and altos; and, finally, a short homophonic statement based on the notes of a D minor triad. Other material appears from time to time but these five ideas form the basic building blocks upon which the entire work is built.

Pärt has specified that the work can be performed either complete or in sections, although its full impact is only truly grasped when listening through from beginning to end. By omitting Odes V, VII and (somewhat puzzlingly) a big chunk from the middle of Ode VIII, Cappella Amsterdam's abridged version clocks in at a CD-friendly 60 minutes. What is lost in breadth is gained in terms of focus and intensity, however. The rich and resonant sound of the original 1998 ECM recording, featuring the Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir, is replaced here by a more intimate ambience. Diction is clearer and the vocal layers are more transparent. A greater balance is maintained between word and sound, text and musical gesture. In striving to get to the essence of the words, Pärt has created 'a precious island in the inner seclusion of our soul', and Cappella Amsterdam under Daniel Reuss more than do justice to *Kanon Pokajenen*'s distilled purity and sublime beauty. **Pwyll ap Siôn**

Selected comparison:

Estonian Philb Chbr Ch, Kaljuste (6/98) (ECM) 457 834-2

Pergolesi • Durante • Mancini

Durante Concerto grosso No 1

Mancini Sonata No 14

Pergolesi Stabat mater^a

^aSonya Yoncheva *sop* ^aKarine Deshayes *contr*

Ensemble Amarillis / Violaine Cochard,

Héloïse Gaillard *rec*

Sony Classical © 88985 36964-2 (56' • DDD • T/t)

Recorded live at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, Paris, June 27, 2016



The steady stream of recordings of Pergolesi's famous death-bed *Stabat*

mater (1736) shows no sign of drying up. The booklet-notes, texts and translations inside Sony's booklet are among the worst-designed that I've seen, although the essential content is all there; a glamorous photo of soloists Sonya Yoncheva and Karine Deshayes hardly seems a thoughtful cover image suitable for conveying the essence of a poem depicting the grieving mother of the crucified Christ. Mind you, Pergolesi's setting of the hymn – like so much Neapolitan church music of the time – is arguably as much about sensuality as it is about piety.

Ensemble Amarillis sustain rich legato lines in the string accompaniments, and muscular articulation in quick movements complements the operatically charged scale of the singing. Yoncheva and Deshayes over-egg proceedings, producing wide vibratos that ill-match the relatively straight timbre of the gut-string accompaniments (which are often theatrical, packed with rhetorical fascination and devoid of complacency). The singers tend to produce strident proclamation rather than gentle compassion, and moments that could offer spiritual consolation are instead laboured because melodic communication lacks subtlety.

Even if this interpretation of the *Stabat mater* is acerbic to my taste, this live recording made at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées places the work in the context of musical culture in Baroque Naples effectively thanks to extrovert performances of instrumental works by Pergolesi's older contemporaries: Mancini's Sonata in G minor, really a recorder concerto in all but name, is played with sensitive shaping and agility by Héloïse Gaillard, and Durante's Concerto grosso in F minor shows Ensemble Amarillis on compelling form. **David Vickers**

A Scarlatti

Missa defunctorum. Magnificat.

Miserere mei, Deus. Salve regina

Odhecaton / Paolo Da Col

Arcana © A398 (77' • DDD • T/t)



Alessandro Scarlatti's *Missa defunctorum* (1717) has never

been recorded before,

although it was performed at Stravinsky's funeral in 1971. A *stile antico* Requiem Mass in D minor, four-part choral lines are accompanied only by subtle continuo (violone, theorbo and organ). Odhecaton's all-male choral ensemble is captured on beguiling form in the ideal acoustic of the Oratorio degli Angeli Custodi in Lucca. Falsettists on the soprano part sometimes pinch a few of their highest notes very slightly, but the interweaving voices produce an attractive juxtaposition of density and transparency. Texts are declaimed crisply yet sensitively, melismatic vowels possess compassionate luminosity, and plangent contrapuntal contours illuminate Scarlatti's harmonic chiaroscuro.

The highlight is the chromatically charged 'Lacrimosa', its exquisite dissonances and harmonic twists redolent of Gesualdo. The addition of two *concertante* violins and use of four solo voices throughout an eloquent *Salve regina* (probably first published 1697) not only demonstrates Scarlatti's facility in progressive *stile moderno* church music but also serves as an *entremet* before a rapturous unaccompanied *Miserere* for double choir: sung by the Capella Sistina on Maundy Thursday in 1708 and preserved in the Vatican library, allegedly the papal choir disliked Scarlatti's complex refrains and thereafter discarded it in favour of the customary Allegri (by then about 60 years old). Odhecaton are on their most scintillating form in a five-voice *Magnificat* that flows between contrasting solo ensemble verses (including female sopranos), animated choral passages and independent continuo bass-lines that collectively invoke an appealing fusion of Palestrina, Monteverdi and Lotti. **David Vickers**

Van Dieren

Symphony No 1, 'Chinese', Op 6^a.

Introit to Topers' Tropes ('Les propos des buveurs' after Rabelais). Elegie^b

^aRebecca Evans *sop* ^aCatherine Wyn-Rogers *contr*

^aNathan Vale *ten* ^aMorgan Pearce *bar* ^aDavid Soar

bass ^bRaphael Wallfisch *vc* BBC National ^aChorus

and Orchestra of Wales / William Boughton

Lyrta © SRCD357 (69' • DDD • T/t)

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Rotterdam-born Bernard van Dieren (1887-1936) settled during his early

twenties in London, where his music enjoyed vociferous support from the likes of Peter Warlock and Cecil Gray. Composed between 1912 and 1914, his First Symphony is scored for five soloists, chorus and orchestra, and sets words from *Die chinesische Flöte*, a 1907 volume of ancient Chinese poetry translated by Hans Bethge (1876-1946) that also inspired Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde*. 'Der Trunkene im Frühling' makes an appearance in van Dieren's work, too, where the bass soloist's portamento at 'Den ganzen, lieben Tag!' (track 7, 2'19") leaps out in the context of a nocturnal, frequently delicate canvas which boasts much subtlety of texture and a notably adventurous harmonic palette (I was most reminded of Schoenberg). Highly imaginative touches and incidental beauties are legion, although, even after a number of hearings, I'm not yet convinced that the symphony adds up to an organic whole. Still, I do feel it's worth persevering – which is precisely why recordings such as this are so invaluable.

The couplings are hardly less tantalising. The *Introit to Topers' Tropes* from 1921 (intended as the orchestral prelude to a large-scale choral work based on 'The Discourse of the Drinkers' from Rabelais's *Gargantua and Pantagruel*) rouses itself from hazy slumber to bacchanalian revelry over 13 quirky minutes. Delius meets Busoni in the *Elegie* for cello and orchestra, probably written around 1910 and another agreeably individual essay that contains some genuinely haunting inspiration.

I'm happy to report that William Boughton secures commendable results from a strong line-up of singers and his assembled BBC NOW forces; Raphael Wallfisch is at his customarily eloquent, self-effacing best in the *Elegie*. Excellently recorded in Cardiff's Hoddinott Hall, and knowledgeably annotated by Alastair Chisholm, this is a most enterprising and fascinating release. **Andrew Achenbach**

Jessye Norman

Bizet Habanera **Schoenberg** Brettli-Lieder

R Strauss Zueignung, Op 10 No 1. Allerseelen, Op 10 No 8. Ständchen, Op 17 No 2. All' mein' Gedanken, Op 21 No 1. Du meines Herzen Krönelein, Op 21 No 2. Nachtgang, Op 29 No 3 **Tchaikovsky** Six Songs, Op 65 – No 1, Sérénade; No 2, Déception; No 3, Sérénade, 'J'aime dans le rayon de la limpide aurore; No 6, Rondel **Wagner** Wesendonck-Lieder

Jessye Norman *sop* **James Levine** *pf*

Orfeo ② C926 161B (80' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Grosses Festspielhaus, Salzburg, August 6, 1991



This is a fascinating and rewarding recital, which shows Jessye Norman's considerable

strengths as well as a few idiosyncrasies – for which James Levine at the piano, no stranger to a leisurely tempo, might also be equally to blame. The fact is, an approach that makes the central *Wesendonck-Lieder* compelling is applied also to the other repertoire, where it doesn't always work so well.

The opening Strauss set is considered and calm, then, rather than ardent (the climax of a leisurely 'Allerseelen' is notably internalised), but the soprano's mature artistry shines through in every bar. The delicate Tchaikovsky songs react to it less well, in performances that are also carefully executed and lovingly turned, but often just feel far too slow.

The account of the *Brettli-Lieder* – not that dissimilar here to the soprano's studio recording, also with Levine – is perhaps not the last word of playful insouciance, but she does still let her hair down convincingly. The two encores include a grandly drawn-out 'Zueignung' and one of the slowest Habaneras I've ever heard.

It's the *Wesendonck-Lieder* that provide the recital's big heart. Here Norman's breadth of phrasing and luxurious tone bring rich rewards (although captured towards the end of her career, and showing an occasional breathiness, the voice is in very good nick throughout). The tempos are very broad again, with 'Im Treibhaus' and 'Träume' both lasting at least a minute longer here than on Norman's earlier Philips recording with orchestra, but she sustains them beautifully, and Levine's caressing touch in the latter is supremely seductive. A disc well worth seeking out, for the Wagner especially.

Hugo Shirley

Wesendonck-Lieder – selected comparison:

Norman, LSO, C Davis

(7/76, 8/85) (PHIL) 412 655-2PH

'Femina moderna'

Auerbach Lullaby **Cederberg-Orreteg** Jordnära

Forte Libera me **Grigorjeva** In paradisum

Klockar Speeches **Larsen** Songs of Youth and

Pleasure **Lindsjö** The Find **Löfberg** Sandskrift

McDowall Regina caeli **Monnakgotla** Apelinen

har mognat **Rehnqvist** Tilt **Rosenberg** Pust

Tarrodi Lume

Allmänna Sängen / Maria Goundorina

BIS ② BIS2224 (76' • DDD/DSD • T/t)



Allmänna Sängen was founded as an academic male-voice choir in the Swedish

university city of Uppsala way back in 1830. In 1963 it finally admitted women. It makes further amends here by disseminating the work of 13 female composers – two of whom bagged the choir's Composition Award with works included on the track list.

It's clear why Anna-Karin Klockar's *Speeches* won in 2016. Her setting of Olympe de Gouges's speech 'The Rights of Woman' is theatrical and properly witty (male voices repeat the womens' ironic list of sovereign male attributes like unthinking imbeciles), while 'The Best Friend', an excerpt from the closing statements of a prosecution attorney at a Missouri trial, furthers verbatim techniques pioneered by Reich, Harvey and Adam Cork. Maria Löfberg's *Sandskrift*, the 2014 winner, contains some imaginative and ear-catching writing but the response to Christina Glasell's imposing text doesn't move often enough beyond the local implications of individual phrases.

And the rest? Inevitably we're dealing with something of a smorgasbord. I hear little of interest in the now-routine cluster chords and faux-medieval dances of Cecilia McDowall's *Regina caeli*; Libby Larsen's *Songs of Youth and Pleasure* are equally derivative and Nana Forte's *Libera me* surely speaks too colloquially given the subject matter. Galina Grigorjeva's *In paradisum* and Susanna Rosenberg's *Pust* do little more than riff on established styles (doubtless the intention), and the indie-pop gait of Clara Lindsjö's *The Find* doesn't suit choral clothing (the text, her own, is beautiful).

Those perceived shortcomings are par for the course given a snapshot of (mostly) local talent. But so, in Scandinavia, are rampantly imaginative creations. Karin Rehnqvist's concept-piece *Tilt* is wonderful: a game of repetition and reflection built on the principals of a pinball machine. Andrea Tarrodi's *Lume* could have been sculpted for decades, a simple but perfect view of Swedish light with clear but penetrating use of harmony, vowel-production and gentle voice distortion. The choir, very fine but without the last levels of technical excellence that some of their professional

Nordic neighbours offer – and sometimes with a slightly woolly soprano tone – rise to the latter piece impressively.

Andrew Mellor

'Minerva Scientifica'

'The Franklin Effect'

Frances-Hoad Photo 51 **FM Lynch** DNA:

Rosalind Franklin. Golden Hand. Minerva

Scientifica Soundscape – I; II; III. Swallowtail

Plowman K-Ras **SJ Thompson** Life Sequences^a

Whitley The Brain is Wider than the Sky.

Theories of Quantum Mechanics

Electric Voice Theatre with ^a**Ellen Solomon** *spkr*

First Hand © FHR51 (48' • DDD)



Rosalind Franklin (1920–58) was one of the 20th century's most important

scientists but she was deprived of her moment in the spotlight due to the machinations of Nobel prize-winners Watson and Crick, who used her groundbreaking crystallographic imaging ('Photo 51') of the DNA double helix as the cornerstone of their research while denying Franklin any credit. A burning sense of injustice is a recurrent theme of this marvellous collection of 'motetta scientifica' [*sic*] by five female British composers (a shame no male colleagues were involved).

Electric Voice Theatre's wonderfully manicured sound, ultra-clear enunciation of the texts – many containing technical and distinctly unsingable terms like 'Geometrogenesis' – and marvellously dramatic delivery of texts and music are wholly winning, the four singers at times taking the roles of Franklin and the villainous Watson and Crick. The myriad styles and resonances in the music are delivered with aplomb, whether the soundscapes of *Minerva Scientifica* by lead soprano Frances Lynch, the echoes of Norfolk folk song (shades of *a cappella* Steeleye Span!) in the delightful *Swallowtail*, the denser writing of Cheryl Frances-Hoad's *Photo 51* or Lynne Plowman's fractured, half-whispered textures opening *K-Ras*.

There's humour here, too, most obviously at the denouement of Lynch's *DNA: Rosalind Franklin*. The only work not wholly successful here is, I feel, Shirley Thompson's diptych *Life Sequences*, where the spoken text, delivered with great authority by Professor Ellen Solomon, falls rather flat, jarring in the musical context. Kate Whitley's integration of speech and music in *Theories of Quantum Mechanics*,

using the singers themselves to declaim the spoken text, works far better. The booklet documents well the 'Franklin Project'.

Required listening for oh, so many reasons!

Guy Rickards

'Out of the Shadows'

'Rediscovered American Art Songs'

Anonymous Auld lang syne (arr D Garner)^a.

Shenandoah (arr Getty)^a. Home, sweet home

(arr Perla)^a **Bowles** Blue Mountain Ballads

Dello Joio Three Songs of Adieu

J Duke Songs on Four Poems by EE Cummings

Kander A Letter from Sullivan Ballou

Nordoff Elegy. Music I heard with you.

Serenade. There shall be more joy. This is the

shape of the leaf. Willow River **Paulus** Songs

of Love and Longing **R Thompson** My soul

doth magnify the Lord (Magnificat). Tapestry.

Velvet Shoes

Lisa Delan *sop* ^a**Matt Haimovitz** *vc* **Kevin Korth** *pf*

Pentatone © PTC5186 572 (76' • DDD • T)



Lisa Delan has put together an enjoyable and valuable programme here.

These are songs one hears rarely, if at all; some of them, in fact, have never been recorded before. And while the seven composers represented all fall on the conservative side of the musical spectrum, there's a satisfying sense of stylistic diversity nonetheless.

On the lighter side, we have Paul Nordoff's songs. He is a fine melodist and at his best can take a simple accompanimental figure and tweak it slightly with a metric shift or harmonic twist to give it interest, as in the sweet, folk-like 'Willow River' – although in 'Music I heard with you' the sweetness turns saccharine. John Woods Duke's four EE Cummings settings are in a similar vein, though more virtuoso in their demands. He conveys the poet's playfulness well, and often imaginatively, but ignores the undercurrents of sensuality and passion, so that a masterful poem like 'i carry your heart' sounds simply banal.

With Paul Bowles's *Blue Mountain Ballads* we move into deeper waters. The surface is still unfailingly attractive, yet the musical choices always reflect a deep sympathy with Tennessee Williams's evocative verses. Norman Dello Joio's *Songs of Adieu* explore the emotions of heartbreak in a touchingly forthright manner and with an effective whiff of theatricality. These go hand in hand with Stephen Paulus's dolorous *Songs of Love and Longing* on classic Japanese *tanka*.

Three traditional songs, arranged by contemporary composers for soprano, piano and cello, are placed as a kind of interlude. David Garner's 'Auld lang syne' and Jack Perla's 'Home, sweet home' are overwrought but Gordon Getty's 'Shenandoah' is exquisitely spare and full of expressive detail. The recital concludes on a high note with three absolutely gorgeous, melancholy songs by the vastly underrated Randall Thompson.

Delan has a light voice, rather like a soprano version of the American mezzo Joan Morris, yet even when her voice is tested, her musicianship and responsiveness to the text are never in question. Kevin Korth provides superb support, full of colour and character. The recorded sound is up to Pentatone's usual high standards. Warmly recommended. **Andrew Farach-Colton**

'So Many Things'

Adams Am I in your light?

Björk Cover me. Hunter **K Bush** Pi

Costello Speak darkly, my angel

Hillborg Kväll **Jacobsen** For sixty cents

Mehldau Love Sublime

Muhly So Many Things **C Shaw** Cant voi l'aube

Sumner/Mathes Practical Arrangement

Wainwright Les feux d'artifice t'appellent

Anne Sofie von Otter *mez* **Brooklyn Rider**

Naïve © V5436 (64' • DDD • T)

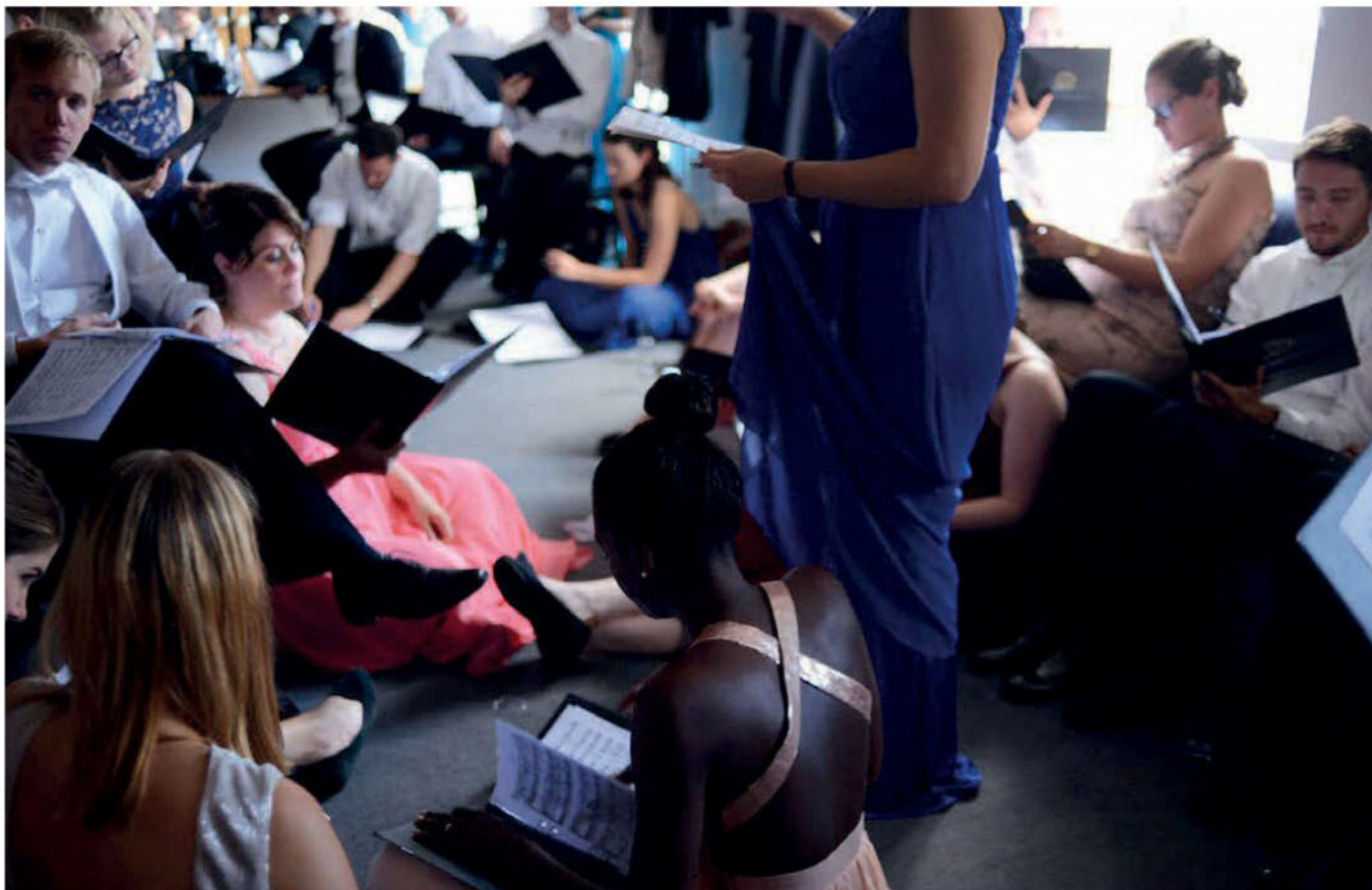


This mix of songs by pop/jazz composers who have worked with the classics, and vice

versa, goes further than mere 'crossover': it's rather a kind of early-21st-century Lieder recital, in von Otter's words 'bringing the two worlds together'. After three previous essays in the genre, she now shows added assurance in projecting such styles of song.

A listen to the 'originals' where they exist confirms both her range of interests and this record's success in encompassing these songs with chamber forces. For example, the ferocious irony and sinister bolero backing of Icelandic magus-figure Björk's 'Hunter' – a very electronic sound – are mirrored here in the quartet's nagging bowing and von Otter's treated vocals. And Erik Arvinder's almost atonal string arrangement well illustrates Björk's escape into unreality, 'Cover me'.

Songs written especially for von Otter by Caroline Shaw, Colin Jacobsen and Nico Muhly tend to the more conventionally illustrative. Shaw sets an old French lyric of lost love – precisely enunciated by von Otter – to a combination



Allmänna Sångern present a smorgasbord of works by 13 female composers

of drones and lute-like pizzicatos. Jacobsen's is a jazzy setting of Lydia Davis's amusingly surreal picture of a Brooklyn coffee shop. Muhly's, genuinely operatic, has much filmic mood-writing for the quartet in Joyce Carol Oates's poem about a suicide.

The running order of the disc functions well by strong contrasts. Kate Bush's witty game with numbers, 'Pi', is succeeded by the brooding atmosphere of John Adams's *Doctor Atomic* aria for Kitty Oppenheimer 'Am I in your light', a mood dispelled by Shaw's lyrical 'Cant voi l'aube'. There are relative blank spots – Sting's 'Practical Arrangement' and Rufus Wainwright's French 'Les feux d'artifice...' are lightweight work from these big names. But overall it's an intriguingly crafted and well-produced song recital, performed (it says) essentially live in the studio.

Mike Ashman

'Under the Shadow'

JS Bach 1080 Love (after Die Kunst der Fuge, BWV1080)^a. Shall I sue (after Solo Cello Suite No 2, BWV1008 – Prelude)^b **Fauré** A Prayer (after Requiem, Op 48 – Libera me)^c

Legrenzi Never come back again (after 'Lumi, potete piangere')^a **Monteverdi** Let me die alone (after Lamento della ninfa)^a **Porpora** Land of

Darkness (after Polifemo – Alto Giove)^d

Purcell Dido and Aeneas – When I am laid in earth^e **Schumann** White as lilies (after 'Ich will meine Seele tauchen, Op 48 No 5)^d

Traditional King Henry^e (arr^{abcde} Jacques Beaud,

^bPatrick Perrier, ^{ac}Salvatore Reitano,

^{cd}David Tixier)

Carlos Mena *countertenor* **Disfonik Orchestra**
Mirare © MIR300 (49' • DDD)



genres amplify both of the original musical worlds? Does it say not only something new, but something worth saying? The booklet note for 'Under the Shadow' – a collaboration between countertenor Carlos Mena and arranger Jacques Beaud – promises 'a multidimensional exploration that goes way beyond a mere mixture based on the binary relationship between jazz and classical', but unfortunately the violent musical collisions staged here offer no such thing.

It's hard to imagine the listener for this album, which takes classical sources

including Purcell, Bach, Fauré and Schumann, strips them for harmonic and melodic parts, and then reassembles them into awkward more-or-less jazz numbers. The dialogue between Baroque music and jazz in particular is a long-established and interesting one, so to join at this late stage with a Dido's Lament sung to the impassive accompaniment of a Hammond organ, fleshed out by blandly realised piano continuo and predictable saxophone obbligato, is simply not enough, however nicely sung. The best that can be said of moody duet 'Never come back again' (a treatment of Legrenzi's 'Lumi, potete piangere') is that its original survives almost intact. The various Bach arrangements lack the wit or joy Jacques Loussier discovered in them nearly 60 years ago.

The other repertoire fares little better. The 'Libera me' from Fauré's Requiem trades cassock for cocktail dress, masquerading as the smooth jazz number 'A Prayer', which treats Fauré's melody to the most vulgar of musical makeovers, while Schumann's 'Ich will meine Seele tauchen' becomes a pop song (and a poor one at that) in 'White as lilies'. There are some excellent, genuinely imaginative crossover discs out there, but this just isn't one of them. **Alexandra Coghlan**

LP RELEASES

Peter Quantrill on a direct-to-disc Brahms symphony cycle from the Berlin Phil and other less pricey delights

Brahms as it happened

A discreet AA logo adorns the bottom left corner of this cloth-bound box and sets it apart from every other Brahms symphony cycle on the market. In the 1980s, DDD was flaunted with the confidence of executive shoulder-pads: digitally recorded, digitally mastered to a digital carrier. The invitation to listen issued by AA is not *démodé* so much as timelessly elegant. During a Brahms and Schumann cycle in the autumn of 2014, a pair of stereo microphones was hung above the Berlin Philharmonic and Sir Simon Rattle. The analogue signal from the microphones was fed directly to a cutting lathe to produce a lacquer analogue master. The masters have been copied – in this case, 1833 times – on heavyweight vinyl. No digital storage, no editing, no ‘patching’: this is the direct-to-disc process.

Direct-to-disc was, not surprisingly, the only recording method available before magnetic tape was developed. Once that became reliable, record companies abandoned direct-to-disc because of the practical difficulties. It became fashionable again at the height of the LP era when Sheffield Labs in the US made a series of audiophile recordings. Other specialists followed, usually sticking to jazz, instrumental and small ensembles. Reviving the process to record a symphony orchestra is brave, though nearly all pre-1950s classical recordings were made this way.

The idea is that the removal of intervening stages between the feed from the microphone mixer and the record cutting head should improve the sound quality. In principle, it is a more purist approach than cutting an LP from a digital master, as is normal with 21st-century LPs. Rattle himself has remarked: ‘To record direct to vinyl was equally rewarding and stressful, the experience my much older colleagues had told about when making 78s. The use of just one pair of microphones resulted in the most honest picture of our orchestra I have heard, and

the Do or Die situation of knowing that the only retake possible is another complete performance elicited a fierce concentration from everyone that is palpable.’

In practice, Rattle is right. I have never heard an orchestral recording so nakedly revealing. It is thrilling and disconcerting to hear the fractionally different attacks of individual violinists in the diminished-seventh plunges of the First Symphony’s opening *Allegro*. More revealing still is the clarinet’s pleading solo in the midst of the recapitulation’s turmoil (bar 420), which evokes the nostalgia-soaked world of the late sonatas as instantly as a faded sepia photograph. Brahms marks it *piano* rather than *pianissimo*, but then Rattle’s trademark dynamic extremes are inevitably heightened by the direct-to-disc process.

To capture every last flicker of nuance, the mastering level is set unusually high, which has necessitated spreading each symphony over three LP sides. Full appreciation of those nuances requires a playback level as high as your system and your neighbours will tolerate. Only then does the solemn tread of pilgrims in the slow movement of the Fourth snap into focus, every step cushioned according to the shifting harmony beneath their feet. Even so, you’ll have to hold your breath to catch parts of the Second Symphony’s finale; at the other extreme, the final bars of the Fourth’s opening movement are overwhelmed by timpani.

There’s none of the dynamic compression or attenuation which affects most LPs towards the end of a side. Instead, the podium-side perspective brings an unsettling degree of stereo spatialisation. Each string section is laid out before you – violins separated, the superbly urgent, dense BPO viola section projecting outwards alongside the firsts – which brings didactic severity to the counterpoint in the slow movement of the Fourth and a rich panoply of complementary argument in the opening movements of the First and Third.



Sir Simon Rattle at the LP cutting lathe signing the master of the complete Brahms symphonies

In quiet passages the Berlin Philharmonie itself is as much a part of the artwork as Brahms, like a Rachel Whiteread sculpture of the embodied space around an object. The corollary is that the audience is present, too, with every rustle and cough as clear as an instrument, though Rattle’s own noises off (try sitting in a front-row seat at one of his concerts) are mysteriously muted.

Considering the performances on their own terms, the Third is least successful. A conductor’s symphony to which Rattle has returned time and again during his Berlin years, on this occasion it is suffocated by his determination to wring out every last drop of expressive juice. The many episodes of the First’s tragedy-to-triumph narrative are more subtly linked and vividly realised than in his 2008 cycle recorded by EMI/Warner Classics, but I would return most readily to the Second and Fourth, which elicited a cooler reaction from Richard Osborne when he reviewed the earlier cycle (A/09). Six years later, the broad tempos and many lyric discursions justified their place with a legato-limned passion and rhetorical conviction that brought to mind the Brahms of Carlo Maria Giulini, one of Rattle’s early heroes.

Each LP fits in a lined inner sleeve and a stiff cardboard envelope. A 78-page hardback book intersperses lightly affixed, superbly reproduced photograph illustrations with essays on the symphonies,



the orchestra's Brahms tradition and the technicalities of the recording process. The price of €499 (excluding p&p!) should convince you that if this set really were a suit, it would be sold on Savile Row.

The special qualities of a purely analogue recording such as the Brahms cycle opposite are exposed as if by a photo negative on another recent set from the Berlin Philharmonic. In the digitally recorded cycle of **Schubert** symphonies, every voice and each section has its place and is in its place. The deficiency is precisely that the sound-image is just that – set back from the listener, an object held up for admiration. And there is much to admire in the orchestra and its playing, transparently balanced and always gracefully turned in best 'period' practice.

The First and Third each fit on a single side, as they used to; every other symphony has an LP to itself, except the *Great C major*, which is spread over two full LPs to minimise any potential loss of detail or compression in the mastering process. I was not so exercised as Richard Osborne in his review of the CD set (8/15) by the tempos of the Ninth; the slow movement builds with a baleful tread towards a genuinely shocking if anachronistically heavy climax. In the earlier symphonies, however, the conductor underlines harmonic cadences as if he were Simon Sechter marking the dying Schubert's homework. The Sixth is especially unpredictable, perhaps thanks to

his view, expressed in the accompanying hardback book, that the piece is a bitter parody of Rossini.

Sony Classical continues to keep the debate around Harnoncourt's legacy lively with LP issues of the Requiems by Verdi and Mozart. From 2005 and 2010 respectively, they are largely free of the rhythmic eccentricity that marks his late symphonic recordings – not only the Schubert above, but also the Mozart and Beethoven sets reviewed in the last Awards issue – a bewildering experience. Sung texts, essays and translations are helpfully printed on the inner gatefold in the practical, old-fashioned way.

Even so, the **Verdi** is a disconcerting outlier in the work's discography. Having stripped away most elements of Verdian style and drama as commonly understood, Harnoncourt replaced them with steady tempos, pedantic counterpoint and a curiously muted, oratorio-style rhetorical delivery which is a much closer idiomatic fit to the **Mozart**. The live recordings in the Musikverein are quiet and yet charged with atmosphere on LP, and both the solo quartets make well-blended teams. However, the 2-LP format for the 50-minute Mozart is excessively generous. The *Dies irae* falls over three different sides including a musically unforgivable break between LPs on the dominant seventh chord which should link the 'Confutatis' to the 'Lacrymosa'.

The best of Sony Classical's Harnoncourt tributes is the most recent, a quirky and exotically vivid pocket history of Viennese dances, **Walzer Revolution**, music from Mozart to Johann Strauss I. The 80 minutes of the original CD are now spread over three LPs in a slightly cumbersome gatefold design. The surfaces, however, are no quieter than recent LPs from the same source and would likely deteriorate in unlined paper envelopes, which should be replaced with antistatic sleeves (I use the Mobile Fidelity brand).

Deutsche Grammophon has steadily rebuilt its LP catalogue during recent years by issuing a few high-profile new releases alongside classic albums replicated with satisfyingly exact attention to detail. The asking price of £35 for **Steve Reich's** *Drumming* box is still a fraction (one-fifth, when I last looked on eBay) of the cost of obtaining the original album. The fascinating bonus is a 'making of' booklet essay which quotes correspondence between Reich and his DG producer, casting aspersions on the competence of at least one living executive and uncovering a perfectionist determination on the part of the composer/performer. His efforts were rewarded by a multitracked recording which, even mixed down to stereo, is an astonishingly sensuous experience, with as much presence in its way as the 'direct-to-disc' Brahms album.

That's no less true of an earlier BPO recording, of **Tchaikovsky's** Fifth Symphony made in 1976. This is the best of a batch of five Karajan LPs, and it catches conductor and orchestra on fire, with an expressive heat rivalled by their Schumann and Schoenberg from the same period. At least as restored to vinyl, the recording explodes common assumptions about the saturated sound of the BPO under Karajan at his pomp, and the effect of the *Andante cantabile* relies at least as much on carefully deployed restraint as the animal intensity of the string section when given its head.

Restraint is a perhaps-surprising watchword of the conductor's accompaniment to the teenage Anne-Sophie Mutter in her debut album of **Mozart** violin concertos (Nos 3 and 5). In a direct comparison the LP scores over DG's Originals CD for giving more body and acoustic context to Mutter's high-gloss sound, which is sharpened to a stiletto heel by the remastering. The proportions of the BPO were further reduced for the 'Karajan does Baroque' album from 1983 though without a concomitant rise in rhythmic verve to rival his Bach recordings of the 1950s. I still go weak-kneed for

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Herbert von Karajan: returning to LP after all these years

the Hammer-horror splendour of the Karajan/Giazotto/BPO *Adagio* (Albinoni effaced almost entirely), though for the full Mantovani, DG should reissue Karajan's 1969 LP, 'Adagio', in the same format.

There is an argument to be made that for all his fascination with the technology of CD, Karajan was an analogue musician; DG struggled to recapture in the 1980s the sound of the BPO that had travelled the world on LP. The orchestra seems not so much to accompany Krystian Zimerman in the piano concertos of Grieg and Schumann as play along from an adjoining chamber, the better perhaps to paper over interpretative cracks between soloist and conductor.

Karajan's 1987 *New Year's Concert* from Vienna was first released on CD only, with surely the most affectionately humane *Annen-Polka* on record. Three decades later it has finally made it to LP in a piece of reverse engineering that prompts a jolt of cognitive dissonance. Any difference in sound is marginal, but the fourth side includes the *Kaiserwalzer* excluded from most of the CD publications.

Another DG replica set is Fritz Wunderlich's studio *Schöne Müllerin* for DG: a gatefold with separate booklet for essay, text and translation. What leaps from the speakers (at least until a slight pitch-wobble and compression towards the end of each side) are the consonants, aspirates and conversational turn of phrase that is the Lieder-singer's art. The same register of immediacy distinguishes the vinyl issue of Joyce DiDonato's concept album on Warner Classics, with the halves of *In War and Peace* divided between LPs. Pop-album packaging dispenses with text (editorial or sung) in favour of indifferently reproduced artist photos.

There are no words either for Alexandre Tharaud's *Rachmaninov*, but his

performance would grace any LP collection in its infancy for the 'majestic assurance' and 'exemplary clarity' noted by Jeremy Nicholas (10/16), and an unhackneyed delight in every page shared by the RLPO and Alexander Vedernikov. Fresh thoughts about the unavoidable Prelude and *Vocalise* are translated into a happy marriage of form and colour, and I love the pure tone of Sabine Devieille in the closing phrases of her solo.

The personally inflected idiosyncracies of Rostropovich in *Bach* have not softened or faded since his 1995 recording of the Suites, which are now housed in a fine box together with his extravagant musings in a well-illustrated booklet. With its rough breathing and chording, dizzying rhythmic fantasy and a volatility more often heard in Prokofiev than Bach, this is playing which will set its face against the wind of whatever performing style holds sway at the time. This transfer, newly remastered for analogue, leaves surprisingly little trace of the Vézelay church by which the cellist set such store.

On Farao, the fleet-footed strings of the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra make a more than passable impression of the Vienna Philharmonic as they waltz up Richard Strauss's metaphysical Alp. Their quick-witted guide is Kent Nagano, who plots a nimble course unburdened by an excess of cod-spiritual profundity and sorts out all the tricky contrapuntal crevasses near the summit. Once there, the side-break is awkwardly negotiated mid-phrase, whereas Karajan's solution was typically elegant, forcing a dramatic cadential halt and then retaking the leap at the opening of Side B. This is, so far, an *Alpine Symphony* to live with and learn from. Farao's engineering presents a blended, mid-stalls perspective which encompasses a huge dynamic range without undue twiddling of the volume.

Included with most of these LPs is an invitation to download a complimentary copy of the recording in various digital formats. Sony Classical and DG offer 320kbps MP3 files: useful for storing on your phone and listening on the move. The 'lossless' FLAC files provided by Warner Classics are a cut above but untagged with metadata and titled only by catalogue and track number, which makes them next to useless for storing in a digital library without laborious fiddling of your own. Only the BPO own-label recordings come with the bells and whistles of better-than-CD-quality 48k WAV files, and a choice of stereo or 5.1 surround sound.

Peter Quantrill

THE RECORDINGS

Brahms Symphonies Nos 1-4 BPO / Rattle

Berliner Philharmoniker €499 ⑥ ●

Schubert Symphonies BPO / Harnoncourt

Berliner Philharmoniker €199 ⑧ ●

'Walzer Revoution'

Concentus Musicus Wien / Harnoncourt

Sony Classical ⑤ ③ ● 88985 34201-1

Verdi Requiem VPO / Harnoncourt

Sony Classical ⑤ ③ ● 88985 34198-1

Mozart Requiem

Concentus Musicus Wien / Harnoncourt

Sony Classical ⑤ ② ● 88985 34200-1

Reich Drumming etc

Steve Reich and Musicians

DG ⑤ ③ ● 479 6310

Tchaikovsky Symphony No 5

BPO / Karajan

DG ⑤ ● 479 6335

Mozart Violin Concertos Nos 3 & 5

Mutter; BPO / Karajan

DG ⑤ ● 479 6333

Albinoni Adagio Pachelbel Canon etc

BPO / Karajan

DG ⑤ ● 479 6336

Grieg, Schumann Piano Concertos

Zimerman; BPO / Karajan

DG ⑤ ● 479 6334

'New Year's Concert 1987'

VPO / Karajan

DG ⑤ ② ● 479 6337

Schubert Die schöne Müllerin etc

Wunderlich; Giesen

DG ⑤ ● 479 6501

Rachmaninov Piano Concerto No 2 etc

Tharaud; RLPO / Vedernikov

Erato ⑤ ● 9029 59326-7

'In War and Peace'

DiDonato; Il Pomo d'Oro / Emelyanychev

Erato ⑤ ● 9029 59284-1

Bach Cello Suites Rostropovich

Warner Classics ⑤ ④ ● 9029 59684-8

R Strauss Eine Alpensinfonie

Gothenburg SO / Nagano

Farao ⑤ ● V107302

Opera



Kate Molleson discovers Eric Chisholm's brutal *Simoon*:

'Harmonium, celesta, tubular bells, spooky wind machine – this is rich and potently atmospheric tone-painting' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 82**



Neil Fisher on Pergolesi's opera written for a star castrato:

'Pergolesi approaches writing for Cafarelli like a kid in a candy shop, unleashing a rollercoaster of floriture' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 90**

Berg

Lulu

Marlis Petersen *sop* Lulu
Johan Reuter *bass-bar* Dr Schön/Jack the Ripper
Daniel Brenna *ten* Alwa
Susan Graham *mez* Countess Geschwitz
Paul Groves *ten* Painter/African Prince
Franz Grundheber *bar* Schigolch
Elizabeth DeShong *mez*
 Wardrobe Mistress/Schoolboy/Page
Martin Winkler *bass-bar* Animal Tamer/Athlete
Orchestra of the Metropolitan Opera, New York /
Lothar Koenigs

Stage director **William Kentridge**

Video director **Matthew Diamond**

Nonesuch © (DVD + Blu-ray) 7559 79453-7

(3h 2' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • Dolby TrueHD

24-bit Surround & stereo • 0 • s)



Far from the monstrous doll figure of Lulus past and present, Marlis Petersen gave the Met audience a Lulu they

could believe in and recognise: a sharp and self-possessed woman in a man's world, not alienated from her surroundings but bored by them. Setting her apart from some otherwise notable contemporary rivals in the role is a vocal range fully integrated across its demanding three-octave tessitura, yielding rather than piercing even while laughing at Geschwitz's devotion to her over the top of the ensemble din in the Paris Scene of the third act, and bringing no less warmth to the *Sprechgesang* scene with Paul Groves's touchingly sung Painter.

Chic costumes may underplay the opera's sleaze and squalor but they also complement the kind of finely honed movement and timing – almost too perfect for their own good – familiar from trend-setting black comedies such as *Seinfeld* and *Mad Men*. It is Don and Betty Draper, not Wotan and Fricka, who come to mind in the Lulu-Dr Schön two-hander which opens Act 2, set in a reassuringly expensive, generically acculturated

apartment. Fidelity comes in many disguises: William Kentridge and his singers are attentive to how Dr Schön would look and sound as a media baron and tabloid editor, compared with his son the indulgent composer, who convincingly resembles Berg himself.

Close-ups limit the degree to which the trademark projections of the William Kentridge/Catherine Meyburgh team offer more than expressionist sketch backdrops. Another sacrificial victim of an ambitious staging to the demands of the screen is the central character's Louise Brooks-styled alter ego at the side of the stage, glimpsed in periodic cutaways.

All the principals are strongly cast. There is as much frisson to Susan Graham's voluptuously sung Countess Geschwitz as there is to Johan Reuter's Dr Schön/Jack the Ripper, oozing power and entitlement from every phrase. Franz Grundheber's Schigolch is a more nuanced and prepossessing figure than in either the under-directed Salzburg Festival staging (EuroArts, A/12) or Olivier Py's Liceu production (DG, 2/12), which suffers from the opposite problem.

Thanks to James Levine's advocacy over more than 30 years, the score is bedded in at the Met as in no other international house. Lothar Koenigs harnesses such virtuoso familiarity to advantage with pacy and incisive conducting. Lulu may be the only character without a musical motif of her own, but after the opera's most arid stretch – at least Berg's completed portion of it – we hear the moment of her return from incarceration thanks to the warmth rippling and swelling through the orchestra.

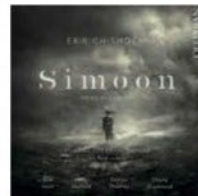
Conducting, singing, direction: they're all of a piece, working to domesticate Berg's feral beast, and making it the funniest, least absurd and most approachable *Lulu* on film. Readers after something more cruel and dirty have plenty of other options though not yet, frustratingly, the film of Patrice Chéreau's 1979 premiere production of Cerha's completion for the Paris Opera.

Peter Quantrill

Chisholm

Simoon

Jane Irwin *sop* Biskra
Philip Sheffield *ten* Yusuf
Damian Thantrey *bar* Guimard
Charlie Drummond *sop* Voice
Music Co-OPERative Scotland / Ian Ryan
 Delphian © DCD34139 (49' • DDD • S/T)



Composer, pianist, conductor, concert promoter and educator Erik Chisholm never

had the attention he deserved, not at home in Scotland or abroad, not during his lifetime (1904-65) or since. He was dubiously nicknamed McBartók – pretty naff, but at least it acknowledges his friendship with the Hungarian composer and his own comparable unflinching blend of modernism, earthiness and folk idioms.

It took until June 2016 for the full version of Chisholm's chamber opera *Simoon* to get its premiere. Written in the early 1950s, based on a Strindberg play and scored for three soloists and small ensemble, it's the last in a triptych of operatic thrillers called 'Murder in Three Keys'. Chisholm loved film noir – as a child he filmed little pastiches of German expressionism on a Pathé Baby Cine Camera – and he was surely drawn to the Strindberg for its tense, acerbic narrative. The plot is brutal. An Algerian woman, a devout Muslim, seeks revenge on a French legionnaire for the murder of her lover. Chisholm was a socialist writing against the backdrop of Charles de Gaulle and the Franco-Algerian crisis; the political significance will not have escaped him.

Until last year *Simoon* had only ever been performed with a piano reduction but that can't have done justice to its teeming inventive thicket of an ensemble score. Harmonium, celesta, tubular bells, four-handed piano, spooky wind machine – this is rich and potently atmospheric tone-



Marlis Petersen as Lulu – 'a sharp and self-possessed woman in a man's world'

painting. The vocal lines are less brilliant, done in a wan sort of expressionism, but Jane Irwin gives a fearless performance as Biskra, Damian Thantrey is bruised and swaggering as Guimard and Philip Sheffield is a sensitive Yusuf. These are the same forces that gave the premiere: Ian Ryan conducting Music Co-OPERative Scotland, a collective of Scottish Opera's freelance orchestral players who clinch the taught, simmering angularity as well as the glittering refinement of Chisholm's ensemble-writing.

Kate Molleson

Donizetti · Bellini

'Allegro io son – Bel canto Arias'

Bellini *I puritani* – A te, o cara^a; Son salvo^b
Donizetti *Dom Sébastien* – Seul sur la terre.
Don Pasquale – Com'è gentil; Cercherò
 lontana terra. *L'elisir d'amore* – Quanto è bella.
Una furtiva lagrima. *La favorite* – Ange si pur.
La fille du régiment – Ah! Mes amis, quel jour
 de fête^c; Pour me rapprocher de Marie.

Rita – Allegro io son

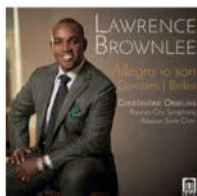
Laurence Brownlee *ten*

^{ab}**Viktorija Miskunaite** *sop*

^a**Andrius Apsega** *bar* ^{ac}**Liudas Mikalauskas** *bass*

**Kaunas State Choir; Kaunas City Symphony
 Orchestra / Constantine Orbelian**

Delos © DE3515 (62' • DDD • T/t)



'Simple but not
 unintelligent' is
 how tenor Lawrence
 Brownlee describes

his *L'elisir d'amore* character Nemorino, which summarises his approach to other characters represented in 'Allegro io son – Bel canto Arias', his return visit to the Kaunas City Symphony under Constantine Orbelian after their blazing Rossini aria collaboration (Delos, 8/14^{US}). The characters are hardly complex but Brownlee's kind of advocacy opens the door to more emotional substance, expressed through a *bel canto* manner that sets his recital apart from others.

The selection of Bellini and Donizetti arias is luxurious. The sunny 'Allegro io son' from Donizetti's *Rita* is an inviting start, while other selections feature secondary soloists such as the able soprano Viktorija Miskunaite, and the well-rehearsed Kaunas State Choir make good, dark-voiced soldiers in 'Ah! Mes amis, quel jour de fête' from *La fille du régiment*. Only occasionally, with 'Seul sur la terre' from Donizetti's *Dom Sébastien*, does the sequencing flag a bit.

Early in his career, Juan Diego Flórez recorded a number of these arias (Decca, 9/03) with his trademark suave attention to the melodic line. Here, Brownlee makes a more personal claim on this music in ways best illustrated by the disc's famous 'Una furtiva lagrima'. He's appropriately plaintive; but by the aria's second strophe he significantly ornaments the vocal line in ways that deepen the emotional perspective. He doesn't deliver the Pavarotti-esque burst of vocal sunshine with the words 'She loves me' or milk individual phrases for pathos in the manner of Marcelo Álvarez (Sony Classical, 12/98). But that's the way of lyric tenors. With his *bel canto* approach, Brownlee has a cleaner, less elongated vocal line than Álvarez, but takes more time because he's singing more notes with emotionally complex cadenzas. Where some tenors use specific word-colouring, Brownlee also takes extra time by making expressive points with rubato.

High notes in this Bellini-Donizetti collection tend to shoot up like skyrocket (in contrast to Rossini's more integrated showmanship), forcing Brownlee into somewhat unfortunate upper-range vocal explosions in Bellini's 'A te, o cara' from *I puritani*. But his pitch is spot-on. And every so often, such as at the end of



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Donizetti's 'Pour me rapprocher de Marie', there's an arresting colouristic turn, reminding you that Brownlee has his own kind of vocal glamour. **David Patrick Stearns**

Glass

Einstein on the Beach

Antoine Silverman *vn* Einstein

The Philip Glass Ensemble / Michael Riesman

Opus Arte © 2014 OA1178D;

© 2014 OABD7173D (4h 23' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080p • DTS-HD MA5.1, DTS5.1 & LPCM stereo • O) Recorded live at the Théâtre du Châtelet, Paris, January 6-7, 2014



Premiered in Avignon in August 1976, then toured across six European countries for two months before selling out New

York's Metropolitan Opera House for two nights, *Einstein on the Beach* was an instant success despite being an opera unlike any other. Fearlessly bold, unclassifiable and unique in terms of Philip Glass's highly repetitive minimalist language and director Robert Wilson's innovative use of theatrical space and movement, *Einstein* contains no plot. There are no conventional arias, duets or vocal ensembles. An offstage chorus sings only numbers and solfège syllables. The orchestra is replaced in the pit by an ensemble comprising amplified flutes, saxophones, bass clarinet, organ, keyboards and synthesiser bass.

The only 'character' as such is a solo violinist dressed as Einstein, who sits somewhere in between stage and pit and never forms part of the onstage action. Instead of an overture we hear a babble of stream-of-consciousness-style texts by Christopher Knowles. Gestures and symbols often speak louder than words: a white, radiating beam of light is a recurrent and abiding image. Each one of the opera's four acts is divided into two or three scenes, connected by a series of entr'actes called Knee Plays. Courtroom and prison scenes are followed by self-contained dance sections – beautifully choreographed by Lucinda Childs – with bodies flowing gracefully and magically through space.

Somehow these disparate parts form an unbroken continuity during the opera's four-and-a-half-hour journey. An underlying energy and momentum finally build up to a terrifying climax in Act 4's Spaceship scene, which is then resolved in a simple message of love and hope that accompanies the opera's fifth and final Knee Play.

Given its unconventional nature and combination of unusual vocal and instrumental forces, performances of *Einstein on the Beach* have been few and far between, adding to the work's mystical aura. In 2012 a new production by Pomegranate Arts – the first in 20 years – toured the opera worldwide, off and on, for three years. It seems fitting that this DVD performance should be filmed at the Théâtre du Châtelet, Paris (in January 2014), back in the country where *Einstein* started its public life. Brilliantly shot with excellent sound quality, judging from photographs of the original 1976 production it's also an accurate representation of how Glass and Wilson originally envisaged it. With excellent performances by a highly versatile 12-part chorus, a well-oiled Philip Glass Ensemble directed by Michael Riesman (which includes a dazzling bebop-style saxophone solo by Andrew Stermann in Act 4 scene 1), and violinist Antoine Silverman as the inscrutable Einstein, this is as close to a definitive version of the opera as you're likely to get. **Pwyll ap Siôn**

Handel

Alcina

Sandrine Piau *sop.*..... Alcina
Maïte Beaumont *mez.*..... Ruggiero
Angélique Noldus *mez.*..... Bradamante
Daniel Behle *ten.*..... Oronte
Sabina Puértolas *sop.*..... Morgana
Chloé Briot *sop.*..... Oberto
Giovanni Furlanetto *bass.*..... Melisso

Tamerlano

Christophe Dumaux *counterten.*..... Tamerlano
Jeremy Ovenden *ten.*..... Bajazet
Sophie Karthäuser *sop.*..... Asteria
Delphine Galou *contr.*..... Andronico
Ann Hallenberg *mez.*..... Irene
Nathan Berg *bass-bar.*..... Leone

Impep Chamber Choir;

Les Talens Lyriques / Christophe Rousset

Stage director Pierre Audi

Video directors ^aStéphan Aubé, ^bMyriam Hoyer

Alpha © 2014 ALPHA715 (6h 29' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS5.1 & stereo • O • S/s)

Recorded live at La Monnaie, Brussels, February 2015



These productions began life a few years apart in Drottningholm before double-bill revivals at the Dutch National Opera and La Monnaie in Brussels. Pierre Audi's post-Baroque stagings are often astutely deliberate in pacing and action, and are

designed simply but artfully (beautiful 18th-century-style costumes, economical lighting, use of mechanical stage flats). At their best, they function as compellingly psychological dramas reminiscent of tragedies by Shakespeare and Racine.

Audi's claustrophobic *Alcina* eschews magic and spectacle entirely, and is low on humanity, wit, variety and sentimental drama – the transformation chorus no longer shows the wondrous liberation of Alcina's victims but instead is misrepresented as a premature finale that mourns a mature woman who has drunk poison after being forsaken by her younger lover (while Oronte murders Morgana in cold blood); the denouement is subverted entirely and the actual end of Handel's opera is cut – as are the ballets. Audi not only neglects many of the charms (pun intended) of Alcina but also eviscerates its enlightenment heart and soul. Happily, Christophe Rousset copiously sprinkles magical fairy dust in a fantastic performance of the music. From the first bow-stroke of the Overture, Les Talens Lyriques play with exceptional mastery of textures, moods and styles; the only musical blemish is clanging theorbo filling up the gaps in 'Ah! mio cor'. Sandrine Piau's stylish precision, passionate phrasing, sensitivity to text and intelligent embellishments (that amplify the emotional essence of the situation and seldom stray from the harmonic logic of Handel's writing) constitute the best-sung interpretation of the title-role to have been issued commercially since Arleen Auger's well-nigh definitive reading for Hickox more than 30 years ago. The rest of the company isn't too far behind that high standard.

Audi is on surer ground with *Tamerlano*, which comes across like a Shakespearean tragedy. Key dramatic set pieces, including Asteria's failed attempt to assassinate Tamerlano and Bajazet's suicide scene, are staged with a directness, simplicity and power that make this like watching a great production of *King Lear*. There are abridgements – most notably a join between Acts 2 and 3 – but the musico-dramatic outcomes are otherwise sensational in every respect. Rousset and Les Talens Lyriques perform with a rare ability to express holistically the score's depictions of defiance, loneliness, introspection, enagement or melancholy. Sophie Karthäuser aptly conveys Asteria's paradox of nobility and desperation. Andronico's impossible predicament, having to choose between political expediency and love, is portrayed sympathetically by Delphine Galou

(although I doubt Senesino would have fallen to the floor in anguish quite so often). As Tamerlano's jilted fiancée Irene, Ann Hallenberg gives a compelling masterclass in how to perform Handel on stage (although the clarinets in 'Par che mi nasca in seno' are buried in the mix).

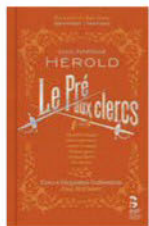
Christophe Dumaux's despot Tamerlano realises gradually that brutality towards his conquered captives cannot bring him the happiness he craves; this crisis evolves plausibly into horrified appeasement in the wake of Bajazet's suicide. Jeremy Ovenden's musicianship and characterisation as Bajazet is by turns disturbing, thrilling and profoundly moving (from raw distress in 'Empio per fatti guerra' to the tenderness of his dying farewell to his daughter); the masterstroke is that, instead of being carried offstage as he dies, Bajazet painfully climbs on to his lost throne and cannot be prised from it. Instead of its usual interpretation as a grim subversion of the *lieto fine*, the minor-key final chorus is sung softly as a compassionate elegy. This is essential viewing for those who take Handel as a dramatist seriously. **David Vickers**

Hérolé



Le Pré aux clercs

Marie-Ève Munger *sop* Isabelle de Montal
Marie Lenormand *mez* Marguerite de Navarre
Jeanne Crousaud *sop* Nicette
Michael Spyres *ten* Mergy
Éric Huchet *ten* Cantarelli
Christian Helmer *bar* Girot
Emiliano González Toro *ten* Comminge
Leandro César *bass-bar* Le Brigadier
Manuel Rebelo *bass* Un Exempt du guet
Tiago Batista, Nuno Fonseca *basses* Archers
Gulbenkian Chorus and Orchestra / Paul McCreesh
 Ediciones Singulares © 2 ES1025
 (122) • DDD • S/T/t)



Operaphiles are indebted to the likes of Opera Rara and Palazzetto Bru Zane for dredging up long-lost works and reviving them

both in performance and on disc. The former specialises in Italian *bel canto*, while Palazzetto Bru Zane, though based in Venice, is devoted to the rediscovery of French rarities. Ferdinand Hérolé is best known now for his infectious ballet *La fille mal gardée*, but *Le Pré aux clercs* ('The Clerks' Meadow') was hugely successful in its day, notching up 1600 performances by 1949 at Paris's Opéra-Comique, where the production associated with this release was mounted in 2015.

The opera revolves around the romantic, political and religious intrigues at the Palais du Louvre and the grounds of the 'Pré aux clercs' inn 10 years after the 1572 St Bartholomew's Day Massacre. The king's sister, Marguerite de Valois, married to the king of Navarre, is being held as a hostage of peace at the Louvre, accompanied by young Countess Isabelle. Navarraise envoy Baron de Mergy, in love with Isabelle, turns up and complications arise, mostly involving the dastardly Comte de Comminge, who desires Isabelle for himself. Lighter, comic elements surround Nicette (Marguerite's god-daughter) and her wedding to Girot, host at the Pré aux clercs. True love wins the day, the opera ending with Isabelle and Mergy reunited after the latter has dispatched Comminge in a duel. Think of it as *Les Huguenots* but with laughs.

Hérolé's effervescent music is performed with tremendous charm by Paul McCreesh and the Gulbenkian Orchestra. The best arias go to Isabelle and Nicette. Isabelle's 'Jour de mon enfance', which opens Act 2 in duet with a splendid violin *concertante*, finds Marie-Ève Munger in exquisite form, coloratura cascading like champagne. Jeanne Crousaud is a spirited Nicette, while mezzo Marie Lenormand is a fine Marguerite. Male roles are dominated by tenors, led by the stylish Michael Spyres as Mergy. Ensembles fizz and it's a joy to hear the mostly francophone cast in acres of dialogue. As always with Palazzetto Bru Zane, the discs are encased in a lavish hardback book, containing the libretto (bravo to any English translation including the exclamations 'Gadzooks!' and 'Egad!'), a synopsis and a series of essays in both French and English. Chapeau! **Mark Pullinger**

'The Jommelli Album'

'Arias for Alto'

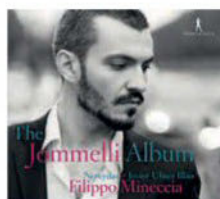
Bajazette - Fra il mar turbato. **La clemenza di Tito** - Se mai senti spirarti sul volto. **Pelope** - Salda rupe. **La schiava liberata** - Parto, ma la speranza.

Cantata per la Natività della Beatissima Vergine - Pastor son'io. **Lamentazioni per il Mercoledì Santo** - O vos omnes. **La Passione di Nostro Signore Gesù Cristo** - Come a vista; Ritornierà fra voi. Sinfonia

Filippo Mineccia *countertenor*

Nereydas / Javier Ulises Illán

Pan Classics © PC10352 (61) • DDD • T/t)



The innovations of Niccolò Jommelli (1714-74) transformed mid-18th-century Italian opera just as much as Gluck's slightly later so-called reforms, but

his tercentenary passed by largely uncelebrated; this recital album was recorded in 2014 after a concert tour around Spain and presents a cross-section of arias from seven different cantatas, oratorios and operas written between 1749 and 1768.

Filippo Mineccia is a visceral performer for whom dramatic characterisation seems to be paramount, while the range of musical moods provides some scope for versatile and astute musicianship. His sustained higher notes can be overly forced but there is plenty of theatrical personality in the florid passagework in Leonte's 'Fra il mar turbato' from *Bajazette* (Turin, 1753), during which the small band Nereydas play turbulent stormy effects with brio. Gently undulating muted strings convey a soft breeze in Sesto's 'Se mai senti spirarti sul volto' from *La clemenza di Tito* (Stuttgart, 1753) - an outstandingly lovely aria that warrants more relaxed singing than we get from Mineccia's mildly effortful exaggerations (though some of his embellishments in the *da capo* are delightfully tender).

There are two assertively sculpted arias for St John from the oratorio *La Passione di Nostro Signore Gesù Cristo* (Rome, 1749), dedicated to Cardinal Henry Benedict Stuart (Bonnie Prince Charlie's younger brother), and the graceful pastoral 'Pastor son'io' from a Christmas cantata for the Blessed Nativity (1750) also dates from Jommelli's Roman period; these show Mineccia's sensitivity with words but there is also some uneven tuning and his timbre is occasionally shrill. Mineccia's singing sounds much more at home in the lively 'Salda rupe' from *Pelope* (Stuttgart, 1755), but there are some vocal flaws in 'O vos omnes' from the *Lamentazioni per il Mercoledì Santo* (c1751) that regrettably diminish an unhindered appreciation of Jommelli's skill.

David Vickers

Krenek

Orpheus und Eurydike

Ronald Hamilton *ten* Orpheus
Dunja Vejzovic *sop* Eurydike
Celina Lindsley *sop* Psyche
Cornelia Kallisch *mez* First Fury
Gabriele Schreckenbach *mez* Second Fury
Jutta Geister *mez* Third Fury
Hans Franzen *bar* Soldier
Wilfried Gahmlich *ten* Sailor
Bo Skovhus *bar* Fool
ORF Chorus and Symphony Orchestra, Vienna / Pinchas Steinberg
 Orfeo © 2 C923 1621 (106) • DDD • T
 Recorded live at the Felsenreitschule, Salzburg, August 23, 1990



'Les Huguenots with laughs': Hérold's effervescent *Le Pré aux clercs* is revived in a performance of tremendous charm



Can the Orpheus and Eurydice legend be dramatised without lyricism?

Nowadays, in this pluralistic era where no single aesthetic reigns, the answer would be 'Why would you want to?'

But in the 1920s and the fierce dawn of modernism, Ernst Krenek was perhaps out to prove what was possible in his purposefully unlyrical *Orpheus und Eurydike*, the third of his 20-plus operas and rarely heard between its 1926 premiere and this 90th-birthday concert performance at the 1990 Salzburg Festival. Though the opera represents an important stage in Krenek's evolution towards *Jonny spielt auf*, I don't see it taking its place alongside Monteverdi and Gluck.

The source material is the 1921 play by Oskar Kokoschka, a rather forced marriage between Maurice Maeterlinck and Hugo von Hofmannsthal with realistic, philosophical-minded human beings in an anti-realistic setting full of minimally motivated events. When Eurydike is abducted by furies for a seven-year sentence in the Underworld, we might

think of the Stalin purges except that she is paroled after five years, confesses her unfaithfulness while away but finally achieves resolution with the tortured Orpheus via a ghostly visitation.

Lacking the jazz influence that gives *Jonny spielt auf* gritty tension, *Orpheus und Eurydike* shows the composer struggling to say what he means. Tonality – and the lyricism that often goes with it – is part of the mixture in his typically wide-reaching vocabulary, but less so here than in other works. Immediately after the compact, inventively scored Prelude, what follows has vigour but murky expressive intent. The orchestra periodically explodes with similarly obscure significance. Atmosphere is minimal; this is theatre of the mind. Monologues have rhetorically brilliant moments but wind down with little sense of theatrical pacing.

Krenek's characterisation of Eurydike has dimension, with her halting manner as she emerges from the Underworld and in her confession of unfaithfulness to Orpheus. Her guardian Psyche is effectively characterised when the Furies first abduct Eurydike. But only in the Act 3 mob-against-Orpheus scene do we hear the more expressively confident music of later Krenek.

The opera could benefit from a more comprehending performance. Is Orpheus supposed to sound as if he's constantly under siege? So it seems with Ronald Hamilton. Dunja Vejzovic goes into the Kundry zone as Eurydike but scales back for some attractive moments. The most appealing singers are Celina Lindsley and young Bo Skovhus, whose brief portrayal of the Fool is the most cleanly articulated performance. The score's big moments are well in hand under Pinchas Steinberg, though voices and orchestra maintain an aural distance. Add to that the German-only libretto, and this recording is a mixed blessing. But without it we might never know this opera exists. **David Patrick Stearns**

Mozart

'Arias'

La clemenza di Tito – S'altro che lacrime. **Die Entführung aus dem Serail** – Durch Zärtlichkeit und Schmeicheln. **La finta giardiniera** – Geme la tortorella. **Lucio Silla** – Strider dento la procella. **Der Schauspieldirektor** – Da schlägt die Abschiedsstunde. Exsultate, jubilate, K165. Schon lacht der holde Frühling, K580. Voi avete un cor fedele, K217. Vorrei spiegarvi, oh Dio!, K418. **Regula Mühlemann** *sop* **Basel Chamber Orchestra / Umberto Benedetti Michelangeli** Sony Classical © 88985 33758-2 (54' • DDD • T/t)

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For the near future Regula Mühlemann's diary looks to be dominated by Bach

and Mozart. The forthcoming concert performances of *La clemenza di Tito*, next in Nézet-Séguin's Mozart opera cycle with an all-star cast including Sonya Yoncheva and Joyce DiDonato, should certainly put the young Swiss soprano on the map.

A foretaste of that is included here. Servilia's 'S'altro che lacrime', sung with gleaming classical poise, is one of the better-known Mozart tracks in her programme, which focuses mostly on his early operas and concert arias. Mühlemann's soprano suits this repertoire well enough, though its clear, brilliant sound does turn hard at times, chiselling slow, lyrical lines as if with the edge of a diamond. An affectionate aria such as the lovely 'Geme la torterella' from *La finta giardiniera* asks for softer colours, though her Blonde in *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* has an attractive spirit, and her coloratura is punched out clearly. *Vorrei spiegarvi, oh Dio!*, surely the most beautiful Mozart showpiece, is too over-bright to admit any grieving tenderness, though Mühlemann goes fearlessly for its vocal extremes, both high and low.

The recital ends with *Exsultate, jubilate*, sung with zest and accompanied attentively by the Kammerorchester Basel conducted by Umberto Benedetti Michelangeli (nephew of the pianist). For a debut solo disc this makes an attractive proposition, though a playing time of 54 minutes is on the short side. The competition is also intense: among recent releases the Gramophone award-winning Mozart disc from Sabine Devieille (Erato, 11/15) has all Mühlemann's virtues plus a lightness of touch, a loveable grace and a sense of fun – a winner on all counts.

Richard Fairman

Nyman

The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat

Matthew Treviño *bass*..... Dr P
Rebecca Sjöwall *sop*..... Mrs P
Ryan MacPherson *ten*..... Neurologist
Nashville Opera / Dean Williamson
Naxos (M) 8 660398 (58' • DDD • S)



Michael Nyman's 1986 opera *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat* is, like other

minimalist stage works, a fundamentally visual opera. Staging is integral to the impact of the music, which often functions as a repetitive rhythmic tapestry or backdrop to the drama. In this case, the visuals are even more essential given the storyline: a case study by the neurologist Oliver Sacks about a musician who has lost the ability to visually process the world around him. The libretto, by Sacks, Christopher Rawlence and Michael Morris, is a detective story, with a sympathetic neurologist delivering a battery of tastes – do you recognise this picture? What is this shape? Can you describe this street? – that reveal the degree to which the ageing singer relies on music rather than visual perception to get through his otherwise happy and productive life.

Although the text-setting is clear – following rather monotonously the basic rhythmic patterns set by the small accompanying ensemble of strings, piano and harp – it pays to consult the online libretto to get a full sense of the humour and self-reflexive irony built into the story. The text will also send one back to favourite literary and musical icons, with citations from Blake and a performance of Schumann's 'Ich grolle nicht' (from *Dichterliebe*) not only adding depth to the characters but underscoring an ominous sense of inner consumption and ebbing life force that haunts Dr P, the focus of this medical-musical investigation.

There are only three cast members and unfortunately one of these, soprano Rebecca Sjöwall, has a thin, shrill voice and another, bass Matthew Treviño, who sings Dr P, is frequently pushed to vocally uncomfortable places (his performance of the Schumann, however, is in his vocal sweet spot). Tenor Ryan MacPherson, as the neurologist, is the best of the three, but given the mechanical text-setting, his character conveys more humanity in the spoken prologue and epilogue than he does in his sung lines. Add to all of this a rather acrid string sound from the instrumental ensemble, and this is not a disc one puts on for repeated pleasure. As a document of an opera that has had some success, and communicates an inspiring message about music as balm and sustenance through life, it may be worth a listen, but better to wait for a production by a local chamber opera that takes full advantage of the work's multisensory potential. **Philip Kennicott**

Paisiello

Fedra

Raffaella Milanese *sop*.....Fedra
Artavazd Sargsyan *ten*.....Teseo
Anna Maria Dell'Oste *sop*.....Aricia
Caterina Poggini *sop*.....Ippolito

Piera Bivona *sop*.....Learco
Esther Andalaro *sop*.....Diana
Sonia Fortunato *mez*.....Tisifone
Salvatore D'Agata *ten*.....Mercurio
Giuseppe Lo Turco *bar*.....Plutone
Chorus and Orchestra of the Teatro Massimo
Bellini, Catania / Jérôme Correas
Dynamic (F) (2) CDS7750 (119' • DDD)
Recorded live, January 2016



No, this is not *Fedora*. The Italian title masks the identity of Phaedra, wife of

Theseus, whose passion for her stepson Hippolytus drives the plot. Familiarity with Rameau's *Hippolyte et Aricie* would be useful as you will get no help from the booklet: no libretto, no synopsis, and a tracklist that mentions only one singer per recitative, so you have to work out whom is being addressed. A summary of the story from antiquity ends with Phaedra's suicide then adds, without explanation, that 'in the opera, the finale is changed'. Presumably Phaedra survives, but who knows?

Giovanni Paisiello is known primarily as the composer of *Il barbiere di Siviglia* (1782), the opera blown out of the water by Rossini's version of 1816. Less well known, perhaps, is the influence of Paisiello's *Barbiere* on Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro* (1786). The two composers had much in common, and not simply because of a shared musical language: one of the arias here, Aricia's 'Se nell'amar', sounds strangely like *Vorrei spiegarvi, oh Dio!*.

Mozart composed that aria in 1783; *Fedra* was first performed in Naples on New Year's Day 1788. Paisiello and his librettist, Luigi Salvioni, cover the ground in just two acts, at some cost to the pacing of the drama: Theseus doesn't learn of Hippolytus's supposed assault on his stepmother, for instance, until nearly halfway through Act 2. The arias are tuneful, with much coloratura for Aricia. Some have orchestral introductions, with charming woodwind solos; in other instances, the character plunges straight in. Phaedra's accusation and later confession are, disappointingly, set in *secco* recitative, despite there being several effective accompanied recitatives elsewhere. The choruses – here sounding rather woolly – include a scene for the Furies straight out of Gluck.

Jérôme Correas makes a good case for the opera, with neat playing from the orchestra. The soloists are variable: the best is Anna Maria Dell'Oste, bright and accurate in Aricia's coloratura. Caterina Poggini matches her well in the opera's

only duet. Raffaella Milanese is impassioned in Phaedra's first aria, reminding one of Elettra in *Idomeneo*, while Artavazd Sargsyan sounds suitably angry in 'Va t'invola'. The smaller roles are not well taken. There is some stage noise and distant applause. **Richard Lawrence**

Pergolesi

Adriano in Siria

Yuriy Mynenko *countertenor*..... Adriano
Romina Basso *contr.*..... Emirena
Franco Fagioli *countertenor*..... Farnaspe
Dilyara Idrisova *sop.*..... Sabina
Çiğdem Soyarslan *sop.*..... Aquilio Tribuno
Juan Sancho *ten.*..... Osroa
Capella Cracoviensis / Jan Tomasz Adamus
 Decca (M) ③ 483 0004DHO3 (178' • DDD • S/T/t)



Pergolesi had weightier operatic ambitions than the buffet-sized *buffo* of

La serva padrona. In 1734 he served up the elaborate three-act *Adriano in Siria* in Naples, setting the story of a bullish despot who marches into the Middle East and gets his comeuppance...well, at least in amorous terms.

There have been at least 60 adaptations of Metastasio's libretto. Caldara wrote the first, and JC Bach's version has had some afterlife. Neither composer had the luxury of the castrato Caffarelli, however, and, just as Pergolesi's writing for Caffarelli's role, Farnaspe, takes the opera to a different level of inspiration, so Decca's recording is motored around Franco Fagioli's performance in the part.

The result is perhaps inevitably lopsided. In an opera written for five sopranos and one tenor, Fagioli's penetrating, syrupy falsetto and quivering vibrato is the voice that makes you sit up. It's highly likely that's how Caffarelli's virtuosity would have struck the Naples audience, too. Yet where a composer such as Handel would incorporate a star castrato's vocal colours into a more developed palette, Pergolesi approaches writing for Caffarelli like a kid in a candy shop – or perhaps the apparently petulant castrato was the one dictating terms. And certainly his two showcase arias, which conclude Acts 1 and 2, are delirious, high-wire acts. In the first, Fagioli tracks an oboe with honeyed trills and leaps up and down his extensive range; in the second, 'Torbido in volto e nero', a horn blows the gale of a gathering storm and Fagioli unleashes a rollercoaster of *fioriture*.

So much for the money shots. The rest is more humdrum. Pergolesi's pacing of the

drama is uneven, with successions of slow arias holding up the momentum and acres of recitative standing in for expressive drama – particularly during the suddenly plot-intensive Act 2, when the Parthians whom Adriano (Hadrian) has subjugated briefly attempt to rebel. If there is tension in Metastasio's premise, it's between love and duty, a Baroque staple but one that can be given greater piquancy than it is here.

The rest of the performers are accomplished but struggle to add definition to underwritten characters. Singing with loftier grace than Fagioli, countertenor Yuriy Mynenko is a flighty, sensitive Adriano. Romina Basso's graver, darker mezzo makes the most of Emirena's grief and indecision – she's caught between Farnaspe's love and the Emperor's passion, but there's not much, musically speaking, that separates her from Dilyara Idrisova's slightly chilly Sabina, Adriano's intended. Juan Sancho blusters effectively as the quelled Parthian king, Osroa, and there's vigorous but not especially characterful support from the Polish ensemble Capella Cracoviensis, conducted by Jan Tomasz Adamus. **Neil Fisher**

Wagner

Der Ring des Nibelungen

Jerome Hines *bass*..... Wotan
Regina Resnik *mez.*..... Fricka
Gerhard Stolze *ten.*..... Loge
Herold Kraus *ten.*..... Mime
Otakar Kraus *bass*..... Alberich
Wilma Schmidt *sop.*..... Freia/Ortlinde/Gutrune
Thomas Stewart *bar.*..... Donner/Gunther
Marga Höffgen *contr.*..... Erda
David Ward *bass*..... Fasolt
Peter Roth-Ehrang *bass*..... Fafner
Fritz Uhl *ten.*..... Siegmund
Régine Crespin *sop.*..... Sieglinde/Third Norn
Gottlob Frick *bass*..... Hagen/Hunding
Hans Hopf *ten.*..... Siegfried
James Milligan *bass*..... Wanderer
Birgit Nilsson *sop.*..... Brünnhilde
Astrid Varnay *sop.*..... Brünnhilde
Chorus and Orchestra of the Bayreuth Festival / Rudolf Kempe

Orfeo (B) ⑬ C928 613Y (14h 40' • ADD • S)
 Recorded live at the Bayreuth Festival, 1961



Rudolf Kempe (here caught in his second of four Bayreuth *Ring* years) is not a pusher

nor a prodder nor a garish illustrator. There is no grandstanding of even the most extrovert passages – which doesn't mean they're understated (try the Entry of the Gods into Valhalla). He has an uncanny

sense of each act's structure – hear the tricky, separate scenes of Act 2 of *Die Walküre*. And of pulse – this is not a slow *Ring* but (beautiful) time out is taken in the *Siegfried* forest or the way back to Brünnhilde's rock in Act 1 of *Götterdämmerung*. He is also a narrator whose attention to the final detail of every musical story told by solo instruments in Wagner's scoring compels attention. As do the different ways in which he locates and plays recurring music – the Fire Music in particular. His many-sided dramatic account of the score paradoxically does combine the fiery with the lyrical. He is a major – yet still sometimes ignored – contributor to the range of top-drawer Wagner-conducting heard at Bayreuth in the 1950s and '60s.

As a Brünnhilde used to Knappertsbusch in the 1950s there's occasionally a sense that Astrid Varnay feels things a little slower in *Die Walküre* than Kempe (the War Cry, declarations in the Todesverkündigung). But she still carries terrific authority, top notes are given out with great confidence and her control and use of text (subtly manipulative in her final debate with Wotan) remain exceptional. Then star of the moment Birgit Nilsson was actually the same age as Varnay, although only allowed to debut as the Festival's Brünnhilde in 1960. She is in fresh, incisive voice – although not without the odd tuning glitch (a problem of the house's unique stage/pit relationship?). She certainly makes a grand sound when it counts but is some way from the emotional understanding of the role (or of Isolde) she was to achieve later in the decade with Karl Böhm and Wieland Wagner.

Early death took the young Canadian baritone James Milligan away from the German repertoire's Heldenbariton roles in prospect after recording Walton and Sullivan under Malcolm Sargent. His Bayreuth debut as the third Wotan was ecstatically praised. Yet, while the high tessitura of the Wanderer holds no problems for him and he shows evident vocal energy and drive in Wagner's long lines, he sounds actively too young and his characterisation is that of a beginner. Jerome Hines's Wotans are likewise technically well achieved and paced but lacking in the Shakespearean detail of Hans Hotter. It's all rather plain Jane – try in *Die Walküre* the continuing crises of Act 2 with Fricka and then his 'confession' to Brünnhilde: good solid vocalism but little colour or intent.

Hans Hopf's timbre is an acquired taste but his Siegfried is strong, well paced and rhythmically alert. Fritz Uhl's Siegmund, in this acoustic, sounds much more of the



Capella Cracoviensis and conductor Jan Tomasz Adamus recording Pergolesi's elaborate three-act *Adriano in Siria*

genuine article than he did as Decca's first Tristan. Gerhard Stolze's Loge is acutely acted and timed, and (as yet) devoid of the vocal mannerisms that cloud his famous records for Solti and Karajan. Herold Kraus is an affecting and unhackneyed Mime. The contribution (aka tasteful controlling hand) of conductor Kempe is most audible in these performances, as it is in his continued championing of the Czech exile Otakar Kraus as Alberich. Not in the gruff vocal tradition of Gustav Neidlinger, Zoltán Kelemen or Ekkehard Wlaschiha, Kraus may sound less black than these Nibelung rivals but he is not a whit less evil or frightening. Kempe's hand surely can also be felt in the casting of Marga Höffgen as Erda – her more mezzo-soprano than contralto tones permitting a huge amount of text to come over clearly – and the lyrical beauty of the smaller female roles, not to mention Régine Crespin's vulnerable Sieglinde. **Mike Ashman**

'Revive'

Berlioz *Les Troyens* – Ah! Ah! Je vais mourir...
Adieu, fière cité Cilea Adriana Lecouvreur –
Acerba voluttà, dolce torura...O vagabonda stella
d'Oriente; Ecco: respiro appena...Io son l'umile
ancella Leoncavallo *La bohème* – È destin, debbo
 andarmene...Marcello mio **Mascagni** *Cavalleria*

rusticana – Voi lo sapete, o mamma **Massenet**
Hérodiade – Venge-moi d'une suprême offense!...
Ne me refuse pas. Werther – Va! Laisse couler mes
larmes Mussorgsky *Boris Godunov* – Marina's Aria
Ponchielli *La Gioconda* – Ho il cuor gonfio di
lagrime...Stella del marinar! Saint-Saëns *Henry VIII*
 – Reine! Je serai reine! *Samson et Dalila* – Samson,
recherchant ma présence...Amour, viens aider ma
faiblesse Thomas *Mignon* – Connais-tu le pays
Verdi *Don Carlo* – Nel giardino del bello^a. *La forza*
del destino – Rataplan, rataplan, rataplan^a
Elīna Garanča *mez*^a **Chorus of the Generalitat**
Valenciana; Orchestra of the Comunitat
Valenciana / Roberto Abbado
 DG © 479 5937GH (61) • DDD • T/H



The newest role Elina Garanča has added to her stage repertoire is Léonor in Donizetti's *La favorite*. This recital, though, takes her away from *bel canto* into distinctly more dramatic Italian, French and (for one number) Russian repertoire.

In her own booklet-note, the Latvian mezzo cites Mascagni's *Santuzza* as the starting point for getting into this heavier music. There's a lot to be impressed with there and in the other Italian numbers,

particularly as she gets into her powerful upper register – her final phrase in *Adriana Lecouvreur*'s 'Io son l'umile ancella' is magnificent.

But I detect a shortage of Italianate fire in her slightly hazy lower register, which means her Principessa di Bouillon is no match for her Adriana. She doesn't do much with the words, either, and seems a little wasted in the two Verdi numbers: I'd rather hear her in 'O don fatale' than the Veil Song, and she's not a natural Preziosilla.

The French items suit her slightly cool voice better. There's a classy, moving grandeur to Didon's 'Adieu, fière cité', and a lovely wistfulness to her Mignon. Charlotte's 'Va! Laisse couler mes larmes' should itself be more of a tearjerker, though, and her Dalila is more sultry than dangerously sexy.

In short, here's a beautifully regulated voice negotiating challenging repertoire with ease, going smoothly through the gears. Vocally it's very impressive, dramatically often less so – an effect exacerbated by dutiful accompaniments and slightly dull engineering. Bonus points for the rarer repertoire; but, while we have full texts and translations, there is nothing about the actual music in the booklet.

Hugo Shirley

REISSUES

Bryce Morrison on a huge centenary celebration of Emil Gilels and **Rob Cowan** on more RCA Living Stereo treasures

Remembering a Russian keyboard Titan

Thankfully we live in an age of sizeable tributes to the finest pianists, both past and present. Massive box sets of Arthur Rubinstein, Vladimir Horowitz, Martha Argerich and Alfred Brendel are now complemented by Melodiya's 50-CD album (listed for about £330) of Emil Gilels's performances dating from 1935 to 1984 (a year before his premature death), and issued to mark the centenary of his birth. Taken live from concerts in Moscow they bear witness to a time when Gilels bestrode the keyboard like a colossus, giving his Russian audiences what they wanted in spades. Deeply committed and above all richly human in a way known to few pianists, Gilels left an indelible mark, radically different from his great compatriot Richter (his 'enigma'), from Rubinstein's urbanity or from Horowitz's 'thousand volts of electricity'. Gilels was too serious a musician to act the sophisticate, inflecting this or that phrase with self-conscious underlining, nuance and emphasis. Such teasing frippery lay outside his domain and, just possibly, beyond his comprehension. Possessor of a stupendous technique Gilels never played the showman or entertainer.

Gilels struck fear into Rubinstein who, on hearing him as a teenager, remarked 'if that boy comes to America I might as well pack my bags and go'. I myself recall a performance of Brahms's Op 116 Fantasy Pieces that seemed to make the hall shake and resonate with a tonal fullness, a 'sweet thunder', a sound that the pianist and teacher Heinrich Neuhaus described as 'rich in noble metal, 20-carat gold, that we find in the voices of the great singers'. The pianist Hiroko Nakamura told me that, after hearing Gilels in those same Brahms pieces, she went home and wept, aware that she could never equal such magnificence. My late teacher, Ronald Smith, returned from his studies in Paris with Marguerite Long to tell us school boys that there was a pianist from Russia 'as great

as Horowitz' but 'more musical', a simple truth that has stayed with me over the years. No less a sense of awe and wonder came from Gilels's younger compatriots, Dmitri Alexeev, Nikolai Demidenko and Evgeny Kissin, while Claudia Cassidy of *The Chicago Tribune* wrote of Gilels's first American performances as possessing 'a blow-torch incandescence', his Tchaikovsky First Concerto 'stewed in Russian juices'. All the more amusing, then, to read of *Time* magazine's verdict that Gilels was 'like an etiolated seedling in a can' before he came to know American sophistication. (Later, the same source was to claim that Van Cliburn – greatly admired by Gilels – was 'like Horowitz and Liberace all rolled into one'. So much for sophistication!)

But enough of generalities. Previously unissued performances (on mainstream labels) of Schumann's Second Piano Sonata (complete with the alternative finale – an intricate hint of the composer's incipient schizophrenia), Bach's *Chromatic Fantasia and Fugue*, Schumann's *Carnaval* and *Études symphoniques*, the last two movements of Rachmaninov's Fourth Concerto (the first regrettably missing), Franck's *Symphonic Variations*, Chopin's *Andante spianato and Grande Polonaise brillante*, Ravel's Concerto for the left hand, Kabalevsky's Second Sonata, the Khachaturian Sonata, a rehearsal of Tchaikovsky's Third Concerto, Brahms's *Paganini* Variations (Book 1) and Scriabin's First Sonata all jostle for attention. All of these, and everything else, is blessedly live, and gloriously unedited, warts and all. And if there are naturally times when Gilels sounded relatively out of sorts these remain like spots on the sun. Oddly, these come mainly in Schumann; oddly, because Schumann has always been at the heart of the greatest Russian pianists repertoires – of Benno Moiseiwitsch, Horowitz and Richter, as well as Gilels. The opening theme of the *Études symphoniques*, while less portentous than Ivo Pogorelich's, comes close in a provocatively

slow tempo, and overall there is a heavily Teutonic approach where Gilels seems impatient with his own solemnity. *Carnaval*, too, finds Gilels in rough-and-ready form, particularly when compared to other more joyous and intimate recordings by, say, Alfred Cortot, Myra Hess and Géza Anda. Schumann apart there is less imaginative resource in the Brahms *Paganini* Variations than from Anda and, surprisingly, a less magisterial command than from Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli. Strong-arm tactics, too, make short work of Ravel's *Valses nobles et sentimentales*, with its niceties of French style (though there is a glorious performance of *Jeux d'eau*).

Lovers of works central to Gilels's immense repertoire – Stravinsky's *Petrushka* (five rather than three movements) or Schumann's First Sonata – will rejoice in several examples for comparison (four of the Schumann) where one can marvel at a differing imaginative scope and magisterial command on several occasions. How he thunders Khachaturian's rhetoric to the heavens in his Sonata or cooks up a storm of virtuosity in the finale of Kabalevsky's Second Sonata. He plays into touch the hallucinatory life of Liszt's First *Valse oubliée* with rapid and nonchalant ease; and who would miss a volatility in Ravel's Toccata that would have unnerved its fastidious composer, offending his precise notions of Gallic musical parameters. Here I am reminded of the little man who approached Horowitz after a recital that included *Jeux d'eau* to say, 'here in Paris we play a little more impressionistically'. Horowitz was later told, much to his astonishment, who his visitor and qualified admirer was. 'C'est Maurice Ravel!'

Gilels takes Rachmaninov's early B flat Prelude to the very edge and in Chopin's 24 Preludes he can make Maurizio Pollini's legendary mastery (his first DG version) seem small-beer in comparison. You seem to hear the very soul of Russia in Tchaikovsky's Six



Emil Gilels in Moscow: Melodiya's centenary tribute to the great Russian pianist is 'beyond praise' according to Bryce Morrison

Pieces, Op 19 and, however much you admire the early Paris recording with André Cluytens of Rachmaninov's Third Concerto (now on Testament), you will be swept away by a live performance that laughs every outrageous difficulty to scorn. Rachmaninov may have claimed he wrote this concerto 'for elephants', lamenting its extreme demands, but even he, great pianist that he was, would have exclaimed in wonder at Gilels's mastery. Gilels's way with the Mozart-Liszt *Figaro* Fantasy will bemuse even the most ardent virtuoso fancier, while Fauré would surely have rejoiced in a sufficiently ardent performance of his First Piano Quartet to erase his dread of pianists who played his music 'with the shutters down'. Greatest of all is Gilels's performance, given at the end of his career, of Beethoven's *Hammerklavier* Sonata. Little sense here of what JW Sullivan (*Beethoven – His Spiritual Development*; Jonathan Cape: 1927) called the 'icy heart of some remote mountain lake' (the *Adagio e sostenuto*), offering instead a profound sense of human grief and elegy. Unlike Artur Schnabel, who attempted Beethoven's near-impossible metronome mark in the opening *Allegro*, there is nothing frantic or demonic, and even in the final fugue Gilels ensures something solidly – rather than desperately – paced. This performance formed a prelude to Gilels's final Royal Festival Hall performance and a bringing-together of the *Hammerklavier* and Scriabin's Third Sonata illustrates a uniting of Gilels's first and

continuing love of Russian Romanticism with the profoundest recesses of the classical repertoire.

Also recently issued is RCA's and CBS's eight-CD set of Gilels's American recordings (approximately £30). Lovers of the later DG recording of Brahms's Second Piano Concerto (with Eugen Jochum conducting) will be surprised to hear on RCA a performance clear-cut and objective to the point of ruthlessness. Yet if the virtuosity is positively visceral (superbly partnered by Fritz Reiner and the Chicago Symphony) there is a corollary in the *Andante*'s still centre that could hardly achieve a greater sense of serenity and space. I would never want to be without either version but of the two, RCA's version ranks among the most thrilling of all Brahms Seconds. The same is true of the Liszt Sonata, whether live in Moscow or in the studio (where, as RCA's cover photo shows, Gilels donned white tie and tails to allow himself an added sense of occasion). During his time in America Gilels played the all-Russian virtuoso to the hilt and whether in repertoire as diverse as Bach's G major *French Suite* or Tchaikovsky's First Concerto a power-house aplomb dominates (his fierce assault on the Bach a vehement contrast to, say, Dame Myra Hess's winning gentleness), while his Tchaikovsky remains among the most trenchant of all recordings.

In conclusion, this has been the listening experience of a lifetime, a reminder of a pianist who rises above comparison and who finds few, if any, equals today. Melodiya's

presentation (unlike RCA's) may leave a lot to be desired with several discs refusing to track on widely differing equipment, and with an accompanying essay that is long and full of errors – but this remains an unfortunate side issue. Somehow Gilels soared above the petty rivalry created by Neuhaus's very public preference for Richter (something Richter regretted), to say nothing of an anti-semitism that plagued him throughout his career, frequently creating intolerable conditions. Gilels and Richter were, in any case, different artists, making you grateful for both. The parallel here is with the sad rivalry between Rubinstein and Horowitz ('Horowitz is a great pianist, but I am the finer musician').

In the final resort Melodiya's issue is beyond praise. Reissues of Gilels have come and gone over the years on a wide variety of labels, but this is the crowning glory, evidence of an awe-inspiring exultance that proves, above all else, that 'it is excellent / To have a giant's strength but it is tyrannous / To use it like a giant'. My own end to long hours of listening would always be with the Bach-Siloti B minor Prelude which Gilels invariably played as a valedictory and deeply spiritual close.

Bryce Morrison

THE RECORDINGS

Emil Gilels: The 100th Anniversary Edition
Melodiya Ⓟ (50 discs) MELCD1002433

Emil Gilels: The Complete RCA & Columbia Collection
RCA Red Seal Ⓟ ⑦ 88875177312

Living Stereo treasures

RCA's Red Seal's latest box, **Living Era: The Remastered Collector's Edition**, is one of the most interesting and absorbing collections of its kind yet issued, with uncommonly high production values, a wide range of repertoire, many top-ranking artists otherwise unrepresented on CD releases in the UK, fine transfers and a 360-page hardback, CD-size book that includes the original LP sleeve-notes. Chamber music is given pride of place in this 60-CD set (selling for about £115), most significantly by the Festival Quartet (Victor Babin, Szymon Goldberg, William Primrose and Nikolai Graudan), a direct outgrowth of informal playing sessions at the Aspen summer music festival in Colorado. We're given incomparably affecting performances of the three Brahms piano quartets as well as Schubert's *Trout* Quintet (with double bass player Stuart Sankey) and the E flat quartets by Beethoven and Schumann. This is model chamber music-playing, strongly stated with inner voices brought vividly to the fore. Try Brahms's A major Quartet, Op 26, the first movement's fervently voiced rhetoric or the *Poco adagio*'s passionate outbursts, or any segment of the Schumann Quartet. Babin and Vitya Vronsky can also be heard in various piano duets.

When it comes to bumper boxes, they don't come much more enticing than this

Some of the Juilliard Quartet material has already appeared on Testament (Beethoven's Op 131, Berg, Carter and William Schuman, for example) but not Dvořák's Quartet Op 61 (with Hugo Wolf's *Italian Serenade*), a fine performance, accompanied in context with Beethoven's Opp 95 (the finale's quicksilver close has to be heard to be believed), 131 and 135, as well as Berg, Webern and Schubert. Intelligence, cut-glass precision – always a given with this group at this time – and playing that's both intense yet sweet-toned guarantee an uncommonly high yield of musical pleasure.

A memorable Leonid Kogan recital of encores includes a sombrely stated account of Bloch's *Nigun* and a performance of Sarasate's *Caprice basque* that starts emphatically but is soon up and running at speed. We're even given a Brahms Hungarian Dance that wasn't on the

original LP. Henryk Szerying is at his superior best in Brahms's Horn Trio (with Joseph Eger and Babin), Beethoven's Horn Sonata, Lalo's *Symphonie espagnole* (pretty unbeatable, this) and another fine encore recital. There are pleasurable programmes featuring the young Jaime Laredo and Liliane Garnier, an accomplished violinist whom I'd never heard, even heard of, before encountering her here. Heifetz pupil Erik Friedman employs his master's voice (so to speak) for a version of Paganini's First Concerto where if you didn't know better you'd swear you were listening to a newly discovered recording by Heifetz himself (who never recorded the work). This is truly fabulous playing. Cello recitals by Gregor Piatigorsky (including Debussy's Sonata, Stravinsky's *Suite italienne*) and Daniil Shafran (Shostakovich and Schubert) are also highly distinctive. André Tchaikowsky plays Mozart and Chopin with a rare degree of spontaneity; Alexander Brailowsky's variable recital features a warmly cosseted *La Plus que lent* and an unexpectedly fierce account of Bartók's *Allegro barbaro*, and Jean Casadesus offer a coolly stated set of Debussy's First Book of *Préludes*.

Among vocal highlights are two memorable recitals by the tenor Cesare Valetti, Schumann's *Dichterliebe* and 'The Art of Song' which includes, on track 6, a rapturously beautiful performance of Alessandro Scarlatti's 'Caldo sangue' that must surely rank alongside the best of Tagliavini, Schipa and McCormack. Galina Vishnevskaya's famous RCA recital centring on Rachmaninov, Tchaikovsky and, most memorably, Prokofiev's 'The Ugly Duckling' reveals an astounding vocal range, both dynamic and expressive. There are also memorable recitals by Zinka Milanov, Birgit Nilsson, Roberta Peters and Maureen Forrester, and what a pleasure to encounter the baritone Mack Harrell (cellist Lynn's father) in two Bach cantatas – Nos 56 and 82 – with Robert Shaw conducting.

Early music is generally well served, with Vivaldi bassoon concertos (Sherman Walt), string music featuring Antonio Janigro and his Zagreb Soloists and a dazzlingly variegated complete set of Handel *Concerti grossi* Op 6 with Alexander Schneider and



his chamber orchestra, just a couple of which have been issued here before on CD – though never, so far as I know, the whole set. These performances have real attitude, especially regarding Romantic phrasing, whether hushed or broadened, and driving rhythms that occasionally make even Harmoncourt sound sluggish. They are also extremely well played. And what of Victoria's Requiem Mass with choral forces conducted by C Robert Zimmerman? I had no idea what to expect but what emerged was an exceedingly beautiful performance, one that I can't imagine even modern choral scholars taking exception to. Also included are thunderous organ recitals by Carl Weinrich and Robert Owen.

As to orchestral records, most are excellent, not least Howard Mitchell and the National Symphony trenchant and purposeful in Shostakovich's Fifth, Munch in Chausson, Franck, Stravinsky and Poulenc, Fiedler in lighter fare and Morton Gould conducting, among other items, the *1812* where the advertised bells and cannon are missing (all is explained in the book). And so it goes on. When it comes to bumper boxes, they don't come much more enticing than this; there are treasures galore, and if this Golden Era is to be extended by even one more volume, put me on the waiting list. **Rob Cowan**

THE RECORDING

Living Stereo: The Remastered Collector's Edition

Various artists

RCA Red Seal © (60 discs) 88985 32174-2

The Editors of Gramophone's sister music magazines, Jazzwise and Songlines, recommend some of their favourite recordings from the past month

Jazz

Brought to you by **jazzwise**

JD Allen

Americana: Musings on Jazz and the Blues

Savant © HCD2155 (Recorded January 2, 2016)



Of all the contemporary tenor players, arguably none has a greater affinity with the blues than JD.

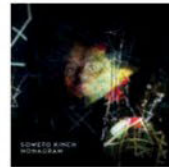
That innate feeling for the blues has always been present in everything he plays, whatever the surroundings. For his whole album dedicated to the genre, Allen has done a lot of research, coming to the conclusion that, 'structurally the 12-bar blues form and the so-called blues scale actually have very little to do with the blues', but 'the blues is the gateway to the past and future of (all) American music'. The opening *Tell the Truth, Shame the Devil* is very much gospel mixed with mid-period Coltrane. This is followed by a 1930s lament by Vera Hall which features passionate bowed bass

from the classically-trained Gregg August and a rolling Royston drum solo as well as deep down Allen tenor. All the other tunes are JD originals except for fellow saxophonist Bill McHenry's *If You're Lonesome, Then You're Not Alone*. All JD Allen records are of interest. This could be his trio's best yet – and most of the tracks, for a change, are over five minutes. A minor classic of its kind. **Tony Hall**

Soweto Kinch

Nonagram

SKP (Rec 2014/16)



'The Legend of Mike Smith' (2013) was predicated on the Seven Deadly Sins and this latest offering from the British saxophonist MC takes its cue from another number, nine, used as a talismanic time signature throughout most

of the material. Nonagram also investigates the tonal possibilities of the odd numbers that can be derived from various geometric shapes such as triangles and the nine-sided nonagram, and for the most part the results are stimulating. The abundance of pieces with a nine and sevenbeat pulse lends to the music a distinctly wavering feel, and in some cases the harmony has been pared right down to the bone, using no more than two pitches (inspired by figures). Interesting as the concept is, the album really benefits from the chemistry of one of the best groups that Kinch has led in a long time, with American drummer Gregory Hutchinson brilliantly anchoring a transatlantic rhythm section in which young Brits, pianist Ruben James and bassist Nick Jurd, impress. There is also a strong political undercurrent to this work, as befits an artist with opinions to go.

Kevin Le Gendre

World Music

Brought to you by **SONGLINES**

Anda Union

Homeland

Hohhot Records © HRO02



The Inner Mongolian group have been together 16 years, yet they only came to international attention with their debut album 'The Wind Horse' and festival performances (including WOMAD) in 2011. But this second album sees the nine-strong ensemble going from strength to strength. The opening song *Jangar (Hometown)* hurls you straight into the sound of scratchy horse-head fiddles, a beating drum and growly throat-singing. It's an arresting statement of identity. It's followed by the much more serene *Lake Dance Saverden*, with a long legato fiddle melody and spectral overtone singing like sparkling sunlight on water. The gorgeous *Buriat Song* features

the female vocals of singer Tsetsegmaa and the hoof-beat songs of the grasslands are featured, such as *The Herdsman*. The songs are about nature, mythology and Mongolian history. There are musical similarities with Tuva's Huun-Huur-Tu, the pioneers of this music, but Anda Union sound fresh and are distinguished by boasting a couple of female members in the band. In short, this is an excellent set of 13 songs exhibiting the superb range of what this extraordinary band can do. **Simon Broughton**

Çiğdem Aslan

A Thousand Cranes

Asphalt Tango © CDATR5716



Çiğdem Aslan is a Turkish-born, Hackney-based singer who first came to my attention when she joined She'Koyokh, the

fabulous Balkan klezmer band. Aslan remains a member of She'Koyokh but on her solo albums she shifts direction, remaining in the Balkans but exploring rebetika, the music of Asia Minor that once delighted listeners from Athens to Anatolia. Since Greece's failed invasion of Turkey in 1917 (and the subsequent exchange of populations) rebetika has often been termed 'the Greek blues'; Aslan, aware its roots are mixed, lets Middle Eastern flavours seep into the music and, in doing so, creates extraordinarily beautiful music. Aslan sings up a storm, equally capable of skipping through a fast tempo on 'Lingo Lingo Şişeler' or brooding intensely on 'Kardioklefra'. Recorded at Athens' historic AntArt studio and beautifully packaged, this album is a magnificent gesture towards proving Greek-Turkish culture is more similar than different; it is also an album of wild, haunted beauty. **Garth Cartwright**

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Shared Dreams, Shared Emotions

The Seto Inland Sea is referred to as "Mediterranean Sea in Japan". This Competition is to be held in Takamatsu, which has a beautiful view of the sea. Our finalists have won other competitions around the world.

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The 4th Takamatsu International Piano Competition

Competition Dates: 2018

March 12-13	Piano Selection
March 14-16	Round 1
March 17-18	Round 2
March 20-21	Round 3
March 24	Final Round
March 25	Result announcement Awarding ceremony

Discipline: Piano

Competition Venue: Sunport Hall Takamatsu - Main Hall

Application Period and Deadline:

1st April 2017 - 20th Sep. 2017 (Postmark is acceptable)

Age limit:

Individuals born between 1st Jan. 1983 and 1st Jan. 2003

Judging Format:

The Initial Selection Round will be judged using DVDs (in DVD-video format) of applicants' performances.

Prize:

1st Prize:	3,000,000 JPY
2nd Prize:	1,000,000 JPY
3rd Prize:	500,000 JPY
4th Prize:	300,000 JPY
5th Prize:	200,000 JPY

- Additional prize for the 1st-prize winner
 - Opportunities to perform with Japanese and overseas orchestras
 - Recitals at halls in Japan and overseas

Juries:

Chair of Jury

Shuku IWASAKI [Pianist, Japan]

Vice Chair of Jury

Susumu AOYAGI [Pianist, Japan]

Jury

Vincenzo BALZANI [Pianist, Italy]

DANG Thai Son [Pianist, Vietnam]

Klaus HELLWIG [Pianist, Germany]

Shinichiro IKEBE [Composer, Japan]

Ikuyo KAMIYA [Pianist, Japan]

Daejin KIM [Pianist, Korea]

Piotr PALECZNY [Pianist, Poland]

Mikhail VOSKRESENSKY [Pianist, Russia]

*The names of the Jury are listed in alphabetical order without their titles.



MUSICAL CONNECTIONS

Toscanini's *Otello*, and the fact that he played at the premiere, sparks two musical journeys

Toscanini the creator

Few conductors have been more intimately associated with the world of Italian opera than Toscanini, whose early career coincided with the final flowering and, to borrow the subtitle of one book on *Turandot*, the end of the great tradition. But his link with the premieres of great works began with the unveiling of Verdi's final tragedy, *Otello*, at La Scala in 1887 – not from the podium but among the cello section.

Toscanini's own Verdi recordings would set down a benchmark of dramatic intensity allied to musical fastidiousness and respect for the score. But as his career as a conductor took off, he became increasingly a champion of a whole raft of Italian composers of the post-Verdi generation. He conducted the premieres of Leoncavallo's *Pagliacci* in 1892 and *Zazà* in 1900, and in 1896 introduced the world to Puccini's *La bohème*.

A couple of years after that he was installed as principal conductor at La Scala, and in his decade in that role was at the helm of a raft of premieres and first Italian performances. Those by Italian composers – the likes of Mascagni, Franchetti and Cilea – have largely fallen out of the repertoire, but it was Toscanini who first introduced *Siegfried*, *Götterdämmerung*, *Salome* as well as *Pelléas et Mélisande* to Italian audiences.

At the New York Met, he was in charge of a second major Puccini premiere with *La fanciulla del West* (1910), a score into which the composer introduced a richness of orchestration itself arguably influenced by Strauss and Debussy.

Once installed back at La Scala in the 1920s, Toscanini also conducted several further premieres including two major unfinished works. He unveiled Puccini's final opera, *Turandot*, in 1926. Coming full circle, however, he also helped complete and, in 1924, premiered *Nerone*, the grand final work of Arrigo Boito, librettist of Verdi's *Otello*. **Hugo Shirley**

Leoncavallo *Pagliacci* – Intermezzo Karajan DG

Leoncavallo *Zazà* – 'Mai più, Zazà' Alagna; Elder DG

Puccini *La bohème* – 'O soave fanciulla' Albanese; Peerce; Toscanini RCA

Wagner *Götterdämmerung* – Immolation Scene Traubel; Toscanini RCA

Strauss *Salome* – final scene Borkh; Reiner Sony

Debussy *Pelléas et Mélisande* – Interlude Act 2, Scene 1 Desormière Warner Classics

Puccini *La fanciulla del West* – 'Ah non temete' Tebaldi, Del Monaco; Capuana Decca

Puccini *Turandot* – Non piangere Liù. Pavarotti; Mehta Decca

Boito *Nero* – 'Scendi sul prognator' Pertile GVOP



Verdi's *Otello*, magnificently conducted by Arturo Toscanini who played in its premiere, starts our journey (Naxos, RCA etc).



Toscanini played cello at the premiere of *Otello*

Recorded premieres

Few world-premiere recordings convey a greater sense of occasion or such abundant recreative flair than Sir Edward Elgar's own November 1931 account with the LSO of his *Falstaff*. In fact, it's a piece of history in more ways than one, for this was the first major venture to be recorded at Abbey Road's Studio No 1, and the mind boggles that the first four 78rpm sides of such an entrancingly malleable and illimitably compassionate document were safely captured by the microphones despite the presence of a media circus. Another pioneering recording that continues to set the benchmark in so many ways is **Ralph Vaughan Williams**'s legendary October 1937 recording of his own Fourth Symphony. With adrenalin levels quite extraordinarily high for a studio project, it's a reading of seismic impact, overwhelming in its cumulative energy. What's more, the composer draws some thrilling playing from Sir Adrian Boult's hand-picked BBC Symphony Orchestra. Other orchestral firsts I would not want

to be without include Václav Talich's miraculously pliable and searingly communicative 1952 version of Suk's *Asrael* with the Czech PO, Serge Koussevitzky's noble Boston SO **Harris** Third (1939), Karel Ančerl's superb Czech PO **Martinů** Sixth (1955) and Leslie Heward's electrifying Hallé **Moeran** Symphony in G minor (1942). I've long held a deep affection for **Fauré**'s adorable First Violin Sonata – and Jacques Thibaud's sublime July 1927 rendering with Alfred Cortot in particular – and continue to be infatuated with Lotte Lenya's matchless delivery of 'Seeräuberjenny' in the first (abridged) recording from 1930 of Weill's *Die Dreigroschenoper*. Decca's 1954 Britten/Pears **Winter Words** is another incredibly special document: it would be a hard heart indeed that did not respond to 'The Choirmaster's Burial' or 'At the Railway Station, Upway'. And for an artists' recorded debut, let me urge immediate investigation of the Elias Quartet's hugely eloquent, intrepidly characterful **Mendelssohn** anthology (Quartets Nos 2 and 6) from 2007. **Andrew Achenbach**

Elgar *Falstaff* Elgar Warner Classics

Vaughan Williams Symphony No 4

Vaughan Williams Warner Classics

Suk *Asrael* Talich Supraphon

Harris Symphony No 3 Koussevitzky Warner Classics

Martinů Symphony No 6 Ančerl Supraphon

Moeran Symphony in G minor Heward Divine Art

Fauré Violin Sonata No 1 Thibaud; Cortot Warner Classics

Weill 'Seeräuberjenny' Lenya Symposium

Britten *Winter Words* Pears; Britten Decca

Mendelssohn String Quartets Elias Quartet Alto



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REPLAY

Rob Cowan's monthly survey of historic reissues and archive recordings

Růžicková's Bach legacy

A box of wonders: a harpsichordist whose Bach-playing transcends fashions and dogma

Listening to the noble Bach-playing of harpsichordist Zuzana Růžicková while reading the tragic details of her biography makes for a humbling experience. Born in Pízen, Czechoslovakia, Růžicková, who hailed from a Jewish background and who this month celebrates her 90th birthday, originally intended to study with the legendary harpsichordist Wanda Landowska. That was before the Nazi invasion of her homeland and the implementation of the Nuremberg Race Laws made her dream impossible. Thereafter, things went from bad to worse, with spells in the concentration camps at Theresienstadt, Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen, slave labour in Hamburg and, post-war, the horrors of Communist anti-Semitism. Beyond the Stalin era, Růžicková was able to record her beloved Bach for international distribution and after the 'Velvet Revolution' she could reclaim her title 'Professor'. Although now retired as a public performer she remains active to this day.

Růžicková's association with Bach is equalled in our era (or thereabouts) only by the symbiotic Bach-performer relationships involving Rosalyn Tureck, Glenn Gould, Helmut Walcha and, in more recent times, Angela Hewitt. When Stephen Plaistow reviewed Book One of Růžicková's *Well-Tempered Clavier* (Erato) in December 1971 he commented on her widely employed propensity for contrasting colours, her dramatic changes of registration within fugues (also the 'echo' effect she brings to bear in the very first Prelude) and her liking for rhetorical *ritardandos*. He also observed that the two E flat Fugues had each been 'married' to the Prelude from the 'wrong' book. This of course is absolutely correct but as Růžicková-pupil Mahan Esfahani points out in his excellent booklet-note for the current reissue Růžicková 'does not shy from applying sometimes avowedly modern aesthetic choices to the music of Bach, a

most obvious example being her choice to pair the E flat major Fugue from the Second Book with the Prelude from the First Book (a decision also made by Busoni in his celebrated edition). She justifies this in lessons by arguing that the grandeur of the Prelude from the First Book is mismatched with the playfulness of its Fugue. An argument based on completely 19th-century ideas, perhaps, but an interesting one in the context of modern concert presentation.'

It's perhaps worth noting that Růžicková honoured exactly the same practice on her equally engaging but occasionally more expansive 1995 recording of the '48' (Panton); also her choice of contrasting harpsichords for the two books, a more brilliant instrument for what she describes as the 'onomatopoeic' Book One and a more robust, even organ-like instrument for the more 'philosophical' Second Book. Comparisons are instructive: take the G major Prelude and Fugue from Book Two, for example, where the Erato recording, with its higher pitch, conveys a palpable sense of sparkle, whereas the Panton option, although conceptually similar, is set lower pitch-wise and sounds somewhat darker. Do read Esfahani's note, which offers many fascinating insights into the intellectual rigour of Růžicková's teaching methods, as well as details of the instruments used.

So how will modern listeners hear Růžicková's Erato '48' in particular? I'd say as a grandiloquent reverberation from Landowska's age, majestic, expressive, with a 'generous response to the humanity and nobility of the music' (SP's phrase) and a marked liking for 16-foot tone (doubling a note an octave below the one specified). The *Goldberg Variations* are played mostly without repeats but with an abundance of tonal variety, but perhaps the grandest and most joyous of her performances as presented here are the seven keyboard Toccatas (BWV910-916) and various solo

concertos, music that seems almost to have been composed with Růžicková's outgoing but strictly ordered brand of virtuosity in mind.

The sonatas with strings are especially memorable. Pierre Fournier's warm, loose-limbed playing in the gamba sonatas suggests deep musical compatibility while Josef Suk contributes tonal lustre to the sonatas with violin. The *French* and *English Suites* imply formal rather than relaxed dance routines – although often viscerally exciting these tend to be forceful, strict-tempo affairs – and the six Partitas (plus the larger-scale French Overture) replicate the dance element on a grander scale, a transformation that suits Růžicková's epic view of them. By contrast she revels in such miniature masterpieces as the Sinfonias and Inventions and the shorter Preludes. A personal favourite among the remaining works is the *Capriccio on the departure of a beloved brother*, which Růžicková invests with the sort of characterisation, pathos and vivid spirit that Landowska herself brought to it many years earlier (RCA).

Landowska's well-known quip 'you play Bach your way, I'll play him his way' fits the agenda here more or less perfectly. There's a sense of rightness to Zuzana Růžicková's Bach that transcends fads and fashions and the deadening impact of scholarly dogma. Some might find it just a mite too stately, its persistent propensity for shifting colours and registrations intrusive. 'In your face' is the appropriate modern phrase I suppose, but there isn't a musical face in existence I'd rather confront than Bach's and I thank Zuzana Růžicková for this sublime close encounter.

THE RECORDING



Bach The Complete Keyboard Works 
Zuzana Růžicková hpd
Erato (B) (20 discs)
9029 59304-4



Zuzana Růžicková: the harpsichordist's characterful Bach recordings are gathered together by Erato this month

Jacqueline Eymar

Once again we can turn to Melo Classic for a CD devoted to a remarkable but little-known pianist, though Jacqueline Eymar did at least make a handful of LPs (Brahms, Fauré and Debussy). A pupil of the fabled Yves Nat she was celebrated in *Le Figaro* for keeping alive 'the tradition of her master: a profound touch without sentimentality, conceptual architecture in her performance, dynamic transition thanks to her combined hand, wrist and forearms.'

Nowhere is this more evident than in a hair-raising account of 'Scarbo' from Ravel's *Gaspard de la Nuit*, or her sensitively phrased and crisply turned Mozart (K283, K311 and K332/300k, the *Adagio* of the latter being especially beautiful). Like Rachmaninov many years before her Eymar emerges from the gentle trio section of Chopin's 'Funeral March' to re-join the main theme triple *forte* then, at the close of the movement, drifts into a scarily ethereal *presto*. Her Fauré (Nocturne No 1, Barcarolle No 2) unfolds its narrative with directness and emotional candour – here we're approximately in Germaine Thyssens-Valentin territory – and her 'late' Brahms trades rhetoric for Gallic poise and vivid colouring.

She offers a brilliant *Appassionata*, combining scintillating fingerwork, fast tempos and sensual textures, and her Schumann (*Kreislarian* in this instance), although far from note-perfect, seems to relish the music's constant shifts in mood. Try sampling the closing *Schnell und spielend* which is delightfully whimsical. A splendid programme, generally well recorded.

THE RECORDING



Mozart, Chopin, Ravel, Fauré, Brahms, Beethoven and Schumann

Jacqueline Eymar *pf*
Melo Classic (M) ② MC1037

Daniil Shafran

Of all the great cellists to make recordings none in my experience is more consistent than the Russian Daniil Shafran. On disc he plays a relatively small repertoire and Melo Classic's Karlsruhe recital from 1959 can happily serve as the ideal Shafran primer. It opens with an account of Schubert's Arpeggione Sonata that to my mind is second only to Feuermann's with Gerald Moore, with endlessly varied vibratos, lightly chattering faster passages (as deft as Heifetz playing the fiddle), intensely expressive phrasing, a burnished, full-bodied tone, singing lines and artfully employed *rubato*.

Debussy's Sonata features strongly plucked *pizzicatos*, the work's finale both assertive and playful. Rostropovich with Britten (Decca) comes pretty close, but doesn't quite level with this. Brahms's Second Cello Sonata features an heroic opening *Allegro vivace* and a warmly drawn *Adagio* and there's the Shostakovich Cello Sonata, a Shafran speciality, a lyrical and witty reading, especially in the finale where the principal theme is pointed with pin-sharp precision. Pianist Walter Bohle serves Shafran as an excellent duo partner and the mono sound is excellent. If you do decide to shell out, play the last track first, Granados's *Danza española* No 5, as good a sampling of

Shafran's seductive art as you'll hear anywhere and a certain spur to play the rest of the programme without delay.

THE RECORDING



Brahms, Debussy, Schubert, Shostakovich and Granados

Daniil Shafran *vc*

Walter Bohle *pf*

Melo Classic (M) MC 3012

Manfred disc premiere

Fabien Koussevitzky, a nephew of the more celebrated Serge Koussevitzky, wisely decided to shorten his surname to 'Sevitzky' in order to avoid inevitable confusion with the Boston Symphony's maestro. He was chief conductor of the Indianapolis SO between 1937 and 1955 and among his few recordings is the first complete recording of Tchaikovsky's *Manfred* Symphony, which dates from 1942 and would remain the work's sole representative on disc until Toscanini made his NBC version some seven years later.

Sevitzky's performance is striking in a number of respects. Firstly, the conductor favours a very dramatic manner of orchestral attack, something that strikes you in all four movements. The second point worth mentioning is that some of the tempos are unusually slow. Take the Trio of the second movement, especially at the start (3'05" into track 6), and then the opening of the third movement which breathes its phrases more expansively than on any other version I've heard, though Sevitzky is by no means inflexible when it comes to manipulating the pace within a movement. The finale is excellent, especially as it rushes towards the coda.

Also included are various shorter Russian works by Glinka, Rimsky-Korsakov, Liadov and more Tchaikovsky, the Waltz from *Eugene Onegin* which is very neatly shaped and phrased. When reviewing Somm's 'Elgar Remastered' set (A/16) I suggested that 'there are "historic" releases that make the grade because they are just that, historic, and there are releases that make history because they are musically overwhelming.' This I would suggest is for the most part in the former category, though the *Manfred* has much musical merit. Mark Obert-Thorn's transfers are first-rate. (M)

THE RECORDING



Tchaikovsky Manfred Symphony, etc

Indianapolis SO /

Fabien Sevitzky

Pristine Audio (M) PASC479

Books



David Threasher on a book that explores the musical life of Vienna:

'Three slices of history paint a bustling picture of the Austrian capital as each century turned'



Sarah Kirkup enjoys an affectionate tribute to a great British flautist:

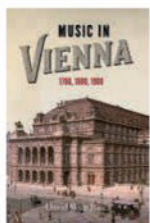
'Bennett's quest for the perfect flute led him to make his own, using a gas poker and a pair of scissors'

Music in Vienna 1700, 1800, 1900

By David Wyn Jones

Boydell, 277pp, HB, £25

ISBN 978-1-78327-107-8



Away from the thriving industry in composer monographs, recent trends in music-writing include

histories of particular centres of musical activities and biographies of particular years. There are now too many of the former to mention but of the latter one thinks especially of Hugh Macdonald's recent *Music in 1853: The Biography of a Year*, in which Brahms, Schumann, Berlioz, Liszt, Wagner and the advent of the railways combine in a story that reads like a great 19th-century novel.

David Wyn Jones casts his net wider as regards timescale but more narrowly in terms of geography. *Music in Vienna 1700 – 1800 – 1900* addresses those three slices of history, painting a bustling picture of the Austrian capital as each century turned, bringing back to life not only the composers active at the time but also, and primarily, the mechanics of musical life in the city. It could be described as a social history of Vienna's music, invoking the city's performers and their working conditions, music publishers and critical publications, the institutions that promoted music and even visitors on the Grand Tour, mining their diaries to discover how the music was received and even what it looked and sounded like.

The Habsburgs naturally loom large. This bizarre dynasty somehow managed to rule whole swathes of Europe for most of the last millennium despite the congenital deficiencies occasioned by an enthusiastic programme of inbreeding but nevertheless threw up its fair share of music lovers, performers and composers. It also knew how to use music for diplomatic purposes: in the 1700 section of *Music in Vienna*,

Jones demonstrates that opera (always sung in Italian) and church music (in Latin; the German tongue was only used for light-hearted songs and comedies) were the province of the Imperial and Royal Court ('königliche und kaiserliche Hof'). Massive operas were used for coronations and imperial weddings as a form of soft diplomacy, demonstrating the virility of the Habsburg succession through the mounting of overwhelmingly extravagant theatrical spectacle.

The structure of the book thus incidentally charts the changing fortunes of the Habsburgs. The 1800 section is perhaps the most detailed (unsurprisingly as late 18th-century music is Jones's principal area of study) and opens in 1791, Mozart's last year. The commission of *La clemenza di Tito* was by all accounts a fiasco. Whereas previous coronation operas were all-new in terms of libretto as well as music, the palaver that surrounded the evolution of *Clemenza* resulted in its being set to a rather hoary old Metastasio libretto in a matter of only a few weeks by its second-choice composer (Salieri, as imperial Kapellmeister, would have been approached first but cried off in the strained circumstances). It was deemed a failure as a Habsburg coronation opera – not grand enough; its staging and costumes did not live up to the festive occasion; the empress Maria Luisa called it 'porcheria tedesca' (roughly 'German muck').

The 'long 19th century' covered the 125 years from the French revolution to the First World War and was itself a period of revolution and the decline of imperial power across Europe – *Habsburgdämmerung*. The rise of the monied (and educated) middle class had wrested music from imperial control into the hands of civic associations, and the removal of the city's fortress walls and the construction of the Ringstrasse and its associated institutions – the Staatsoper and Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde as well as museums and government buildings – had provided artistic activities for the upwardly mobile. The big names of the time included the conductors Otto Nicolai and Gustav

Mahler, while the repertoire of the theatres and concert halls no longer relied on the new and the novel. Beethoven (especially his Ninth Symphony) had become the bedrock of a historical repertoire, while the opera houses fell back on Mozart (always now sung in German) and, more and more, Wagner. Operetta became the local speciality and even Strauss found that pastiching light opera alongside an 18th-century aesthetic was a reliable route to theatrical success. Events in mid-1914 put paid to a planned Strauss Week at the court opera but instead the city's musical resources were channelled into benefit concerts for those in active service, their widows and orphans. The backbone of the repertoire was not Strauss or Schoenberg but Beethoven's *Eroica* – an ironic reflection of war-torn Europe a century earlier.

David Wyn Jones's triumphant volume tells the story of musical Vienna with minimal recourse to technical jargon and with just enough illustrative content to illuminate his narrative. The thoroughness of his research has resulted in vivid and compelling portraits of Vienna at three major points in its musical and social history. Anyone interested in music has to be interested in Vienna, and Jones proves an impeccably informed and wry chronicler of the fortunes of the City of Music.

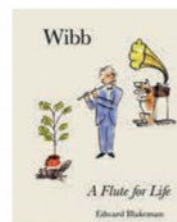
David Threasher

Wibb: A Flute for Life

By Edward Blakeman

Tony Bingham, 205pp, PB, £24.95

ISBN 978-0-94611-310-1



'Wibb': a name that was frequently bandied about during my formative flute-playing years. But

although I encountered his recordings, I never got to meet him, let alone have a lesson with him. So what is it about William Bennett that makes him such an



'Enthusiasm for the flute and for life': Webb with Yehudi Menuhin

inspiring flautist? (And why do people call him 'Webb'?)

I found out the answers to these questions, and more, in Edward Blakeman's heartfelt book. It's a fitting tribute to the 80-year-old English flautist – awarded an OBE in 1995 for his distinguished services to music – by an author who, as Head of Music at BBC Radio 3 and a fellow flautist, has known Webb for many years, professionally and personally.

A Flute for Life is an apt title, spanning a lifetime of flute-playing, from a London- and Buckinghamshire-based childhood, to studies in London and Paris, through to a career as an orchestral and chamber musician and teacher (Webb is currently a professor at the Royal Academy of Music). All chapters are clearly signposted, the most substantial being those devoted to teaching and playing. Throughout, we are treated to an array of artwork: concert flyers, photographs, letters and, most appealingly, illustrations by Webb himself – sketches, caricatures and pastels. These help to break up the copy (much of which comprises quotes by Webb) and they're also superbly executed.

But back to the beginning, to 1936 when William Ingham Brooke Bennett (hence the moniker!) was born in London, an only child to artist parents, both of whom were professional architects. Thrown into a world of artistic gatherings and exhibitions, Webb quickly excelled at painting –

although music was never far away. He recalls listening to Beethoven's Fifth on the family's wind-up gramophone, and we learn about his friendship with Edmund Rubbra, whose family became neighbours when the Bennetts moved to Buckinghamshire during the war. It was at the Rubbras' house that Webb first heard a recording by Jean-Pierre Rampal; around the same time, he was also given his first recording of Marcel Moyse. At seven, Webb was sent away to school and music became a refuge – first it was the recorder, then it was the piano (and later guitar). But it was the sound of the flute that entranced Webb, and at the age of 12, having started off with a plastic whistle, he persuaded his parents to buy him a proper instrument.

Several of Webb's personality traits leap off the page immediately. To begin with, he is astonishingly practical. At the beginning of his career, his quest for the perfect flute led him to make his own, using a gas poker and a pair of scissors. Even today, he'll take a tuning key with him to the Academy because 'the pianos are all frightfully out of tune'. And this practical quality links to the importance he places on sound. As a boy he spent hours at the piano exploring the contrasts between the natural harmonic series and the instrument's equal temperament, and he continues to practise harmonic exercises on the flute because 'for a note to have good tone, the harmonics

have to be in tune'. (As we learn, tuning is an ongoing obsession for Webb, and he offers lots of tips on this topic, complete with diagrams and exercises.)

But vibrato and tone are also hugely important to him (as is tonguing: 'Don't say "t", say "nd!"'), as we discover through his recollections of lessons with the great English player Geoffrey Gilbert in London and the French master Marcel Moyse in Paris. Although Gilbert was more methodical and reserved compared to the flamboyant Moyse, the two teachers complemented each other. Webb found that by combining the English and French styles – by varying the 'hard pulled smile' with 'loose-lip playing' – a bigger sound palette emerged.

Producing a rich, variable tone is only the start, though. The flute must 'sing', too, and encounters with Janet Baker and April Cantelo proved life-changing in this regard. But even more important to Webb is developing the musical line: a phrase must lead somewhere. It was a belief that paid dividends; on returning to London from Paris in 1958, he was invited to play with the RPO, ECO, LSO and the Academy of St Martin in the Fields, among others. He was also accompanied by George Malcolm and, notably, Clifford Benson, with whom he would form a longstanding duo. There are plenty of colourful anecdotes surrounding these musical encounters (Webb doesn't hold back!), providing a fascinating insight into the London classical music scene at that time. In parallel, Webb was enjoying a prolific recording career, and Blakeman helpfully includes a 'Top 20' list of solo and chamber recordings.

If I have any quibbles, it's that the quotes from Webb are too long. (They are also in italics, which I found irritating.) Blakeman seems to have transcribed every word of every conversation, which can result in too much repetition and not enough clarity. There is also an enormous amount of technical information relating to the flute itself, which even I, as a flautist, found hard going.

But none of this can dent my enthusiasm for a flautist who himself has so much enthusiasm, both for the flute and for life. If it risks getting a bit too serious, Webb typically lightens the mood. Of Menuhin playing the Bach Triple: 'It was a centipede with a pair of balls between each set of legs!' On making Berio sound 'romantic': 'It was like putting lipstick on a dead potato!' And on good posture: 'With your feet apart you are strong like a wineglass with a good-sized base'. Maybe it's not too late to have that lesson after all. **Sarah Kirkup**

Classics RECONSIDERED



Serafin's *Rigoletto* features the dream team of Gobbi, Callas and Di Stefano, but has it stood the test of time? **Mike Ashman** and **David Patrick Stearns** ponder the pros and cons



Verdi

Rigoletto

Tito Gobbi bar Rigoletto **Maria Callas** *sop* Gilda
Giuseppe Di Stefano *ten* Duke of Mantua et al
Chor and Orch of La Scala, Milan / Tullio Serafin
Warner Classics © 2 2564 634095

From Columbia ● 33CXS 1324-26

The excitement comes more from the singers than from Serafin, who is stately and 'classical'. The three soloists on which all finally depends seem bent on extracting the last drop from the famous score. Yet the result is not in some ways quite what is wanted. Callas and Gobbi make rather

heavy weather of that marvellous second scene. *She* misses the virginal, blithe insouciance of the girl, *he* breaks up, as for critical examination, music which is nothing if not spontaneous. When Di Stefano bounces in, the temperature goes up sharply. He would get very high marks save that when he does bring off a fine drawn *decrescendo* his tone clouds right over. Team Callas-Di Stefano are well up to form in their first duet, and the 'Addio, addio' is highly exciting, if less naively charming than some versions. Callas's 'Caro nome' is all the same a much more elaborate and prima

donna-ish affair than Erna Berger's. Not that she ever sounds bored or perfunctory; quite the contrary. But where Berger opted for simplicity, Callas embroiders with extra trills and also that cadenza with the 'bird tweetings' at the top which always seems to me to hold up the dreamy flow of the aria. The total effect of Gobbi's performance, I must make plain, is very noble. Perhaps with a subtler conductor, the cardinal 'flow' which is so important an element in a really great *Rigoletto* would have come forth more strongly. But these are hypercriticisms! **Philip Hope-Wallace** (2/56)

Mike Ashman Returning to this 61-year-old set currently hailed by *Gramophone* as the leading recording of the piece, I find I (still) am not quite with it! Yes, there are the five figures (Callas, Di Stefano, Gobbi, Serafin and producer Walter Legge) who separately or together took part in some 17 recordings of Italian opera for Columbia. Yes, there is wonderful vocal acting by Callas, who takes Gilda from young daddy's girl to distracted, fatally enamoured teenage Duke's mistress. Yes, Gobbi is a master of different voices: oily jokes at court, dangerously soppy affection for his daughter, a genuinely frightening unhinged roughness for 'Cortigiani...' and when he's upset. But what about the recording quality, the ensemble, Di Stefano's Duke and (I can almost hear the gasps of horror) Serafin's conducting?

David Patrick Stearns Whoa! I give the recording more slack because of its time-capsule status – on several levels. The opera itself has fail-safe dramaturgy with its superb pacing and theatrical events that vividly project three kinds of love: blood ties between father and daughter;

idealised love between Gilda and the Duke; and selfish, sex-driven love between the Duke and any female in his immediate sphere. It lends itself well to updating, as in the Met's rat-pack *Rigoletto*, but is so rooted to its origins that it doesn't withstand high-concept productions that comment on it from an ironic distance.

The recording is also a capsule of its time, when EMI was setting up shop at La Scala each summer in the mid-1950s, recording three operas in succession – mostly with Callas, who had sung Gilda in Mexico. But by 1955, *La divina* perhaps wasn't going to sing any role that had her being stuffed into a bag. As modern as she was, she still had vestiges of the previous generation's extravagant vocal gestures, which may explain Di Stefano's vocal choices. He always begins an aria with spot-on pitch and then goes his own way. Some of his *pianissimos* have jaw-dropping control. And then he slacks off. He reminds me of Giovanni Martinelli, who at first sounded like he was yelling rather than singing, but on further listening delivered a highly visceral characterisation. In this recording, Di Stefano's charisma versus

musicianship ratio isn't weighted towards the latter – particularly next to today's slimmer voices who deliver theatrical excitement on a good night plus a clearer idea of what Verdi wrote.

MA I've liked Di Stefano when he's being brave under pressure or suffering (as in *Tosca* or *Cavalleria rusticana*). But as the Duke here he seems to have the classic lead man's problem of wanting to be liked; he's never nasty enough. Both 'Questa o quella' and 'La donna è mobile' are happy, smiley, jokey, sung as one of the lads about town. Also, he's not very precise about keeping in the fast recitative tramlines in which Verdi establishes his character from the start or (as you've noted) staying on pitch. Nor does he get to sing his big Act 2 cabaletta 'Possente amor' because (and it's another problem I have with this set), although *Rigoletto* is (a) short and (b) popular, Legge and Serafin cautiously decided to go with several of the traditional theatre cuts involving Gilda.

DPS I wasn't sure what you meant about Di Stefano wanting to be liked. But



Maria Callas and Giuseppe Di Stefano during the sessions at the Teatro alla Scala, Milan, in September 1955

returning to his opening aria, I noticed how he sings with a breezy lilt. Then I stumbled upon a live relay of Pavarotti and Riccardo Chailly in Chicago in 1979, where the more driven rhythm has a nasty edge that says, 'This is who I am and nobody stops me.' That's a far more powerful plot engine for the rest of the opera. Di Stefano also suffers from comparison with the ultra-precise Callas, who delivers perhaps the most controlled singing of her career, scaling back her voice to sound girlish – doing so quite successfully and with spot-on pitch, high notes and all. Astounding. There was a time when I wondered, 'Why hire Callas when she spends half the role not sounding like herself?' But the great contrast between pre- and post-seduction Gilda conveys a point easily forgotten: that her life is ruined by submitting to the Duke. No decent marriage match is possible. So Di Stefano can try to be liked all he wants: Callas shows us how inhumane he is.

MA I must join you in the recording's defence here. Callas's Gilda is amazingly well thought out and executed, especially that key dramatic change you mention. To this I would add the suggestion – contrary to the charge of over-elaboration in *Gramophone's* original review – that the Callas/Serafin decorations in 'Caro nome' are intentionally Bellinian. Just like the coloratura in Bellini's operas the vocal acrobatics here map the obsession and even madness of the heroine in thrall to her new lover. Callas is also terrifically detailed (and psychologically modern) in Act 2's simultaneous confession of shame and

fascination, 'Tutte le feste al tempio'. As you suggest, Callas 'not sounding like herself' is, of course, great acting, going way beyond the hurt soubrette-y prettiness with which some rivals content themselves.

DPS As for Serafin – compared with his demonic contemporary De Sabata, I wonder if his greatness as a conductor had to do with what he inspired his singers to do and giving them a solid musical framework in which they could do their best. Serafin's only all-orchestral disc, a collection of Rossini overtures, is perfectly solid but nothing more. Revisiting this *Rigoletto*, though, I appreciated the cold-sweat terror he brings to the opening chords. Later, in Act 2, he truly conveys the depth of tragedy that's possible when familial and sexual bonds collide head on. But considering how the orchestra is somewhat recessed in the sound picture, we may be missing a few things.

MA I take both your points about his conducting, certainly the one on accompanying and supporting his singers well. There are moments too in his 1943 *Ballo* when, like at the opening here, he conjures precisely the musical atmosphere the stage drama demands. But I don't find nearly enough of that in this *Rigoletto*. I also think he's too indulgent timewise towards Di Stefano. Technically, I wish that he and the recording team had made more of Verdi's deliberate (and dramatic) yo-yoing between the stage band and the pit orchestra in the first scene. I'd go so far as to say that the Columbia La Scala sequence are not great technical recordings per se.

DPS As for the title-role, Leonard Warren has the ideal vocal weight for it. Gobbi is lighter, perhaps more vulnerable. At times in his great Act 2 scenes he seems to miss expressive opportunities, but in fact he's building a longer dramatic arc.

MA Yes and I think that results in a very serious, calculated *Rigoletto*, more the grieving father and put-upon servant than the cunning jester. And Gobbi's emotionalism with Gilda – and his shock at Monterone's curse – are clearer dramatically than with many other *Rigolettos* past and present. It's to pick out his scenes that I will return to this set – even if I do have too many reservations overall to call the whole thing 'a classic', which ultimately is as a result of the conducting. Compare both the tension and the sense of tragedy in the final act here with Toscanini's live 1944 concert (RCA, with Warren in his prime); or Solti (RCA, with Alfredo Kraus's stunning Duke); or Muti's second (Sony) complete recording: they're all leading the drama, whereas Serafin is backing it – stylishly, yes, but your heart's just not in your mouth at the many blood-and-guts moments of early Verdi (often appearances by Gilda or Monterone). All those do better with the work's still-disturbing anti-Establishment theme of the 'baddie' getting away with everything.

DPS To my mind, the Serafin set retains its classic status – but as a historic recording. With its many highly artistic performances delivered in a manner not heard today, the set is a landmark in the opera's performance history, and needs to be heard in terms of what it is – without expecting it to be the complete *Rigoletto* experience. Unquestionably, the set takes its place alongside the live 1935 Met set, which is a revelation from a far more vocally distant time – featuring Frederick Jagel with his pre-Caruso vocal production, a tremulous, affecting Lawrence Tibbett and a solid Lily Pons (Naxos 8 110020-21). Then there's the live 1945 Met version starring Jussi Björling (my first choice for most things), Warren and Bidú Sayão (Naxos 8 110051-52), but with challenging sound quality. Warren's 1950 studio set has come late to CD but with thoroughly viable co-stars Jan Peerce and Erna Berger and excellent sound for that period (RCA 88883 73011-2). And you have Robert Merrill covered with your mention of the Solti recording and Renato Bruson in the Muti recording. All are bold, unique personalities. Every generation seems to be its own golden age for *Rigoletto*. How many other operas are so lucky? **G**

THE SPECIALIST'S GUIDE TO...

Winter music

Jeremy Nicholas suggests 10 recordings for the post-Christmas slump which evoke the spirit of this chilly, bracing season. And wouldn't it be nice to hear this sort of wintry music piped in our shops?

Popular music is eloquent on many subjects, love (or lack of it) being pre-eminent. One particularly fruitful area guaranteed to bring a comforting ker-ching to the bank balance of any lyricist or composer is the Christmas hit song. You have to feel sorry for the poor shop assistants who from early November to close of play on Christmas Eve have to spend their days in a shop or department store where Christmas carols and pop songs assail their ears non-stop. Can you imagine anything more depressing than having Brenda Lee singing 'Rockin' around the Christmas Tree' on a loop that repeats every 30 minutes? There should be

a law against it – though, to be fair, the shop assistants I have spoken to say that after a while they become immune to it; they no longer hear the music.

As GK Chesterton once noted: 'Poets have been mysteriously silent on the subject of cheese.' Similarly, pop music, so garrulous in its celebration of Christmas, becomes a virtual 'silent night' on the subject of winter, cold, snow, freezing fog and ice. Classical music, on the other hand, is more than generous when it comes to depicting winter in all its different forms. An icy blast, it would seem, stirs the creative juices. This guide could have been twice as long had it had the space

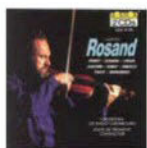
to include evocations of winter by Vivaldi, Glazunov, Delius, Prokofiev and Chopin among many others; of snow by Debussy, Thompson and Sviridov; of ice and frost by Purcell – let alone the more than 30 published settings of Shakespeare's poem 'Blow, Blow, Thou Winter Wind'.

Wouldn't it be nice in these gloomy months after Christmas and the start of the new year to hear some of this music played in those same shops and department stores as a replacement for Brenda Lee et al? You do occasionally hear some played in the shopping malls of European capitals, I've noticed. Here in the UK there's not a snowball's chance in hell. **G**



Winter Landscape with Skaters on a Frozen River by Dutch painter Aert van der Neer (1603-77) – a wintry scene of the kind evoked by Meyerbeer's music in *Les patineurs*

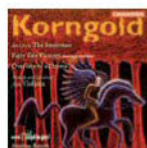
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Ysaÿe
Chant d'hiver
Aaron Rosand *vn*
Luxembourg RO /
Louis de Froment

Vox (3/73)

Subtitled 'Troisième poème pour violon et orchestre réduit', Ysaÿe's *Winter Song* (1902) is from the same stable as Chausson's better-known *Poème* (1896). The music is more brooding than wintry, but in the hands of Aaron Rosand, with forward momentum and beautifully judged climaxes, it sticks in the memory. Ysaÿe later wrote another winter tone-poem for his instrument: *Les neiges d'antan*.



Korngold
Der Schneemann, Act 1
BBC Philharmonic /
Matthias Bamert
Chandos (4/99)

Ballet pantomime *The Snowman* is based on a *commedia dell'arte* scenario written by Korngold's father, Julius. It was written in late 1908 and spring 1909 when the composer was 11 years old and caused a sensation when premiered before the emperor in Vienna in 1910, orchestrated by the prodigy's mentor, Zemlinsky. Chandos can be proud of their championing of Korngold's music, and this richly textured score is perfectly reflected in the disc's opulent sound picture.



Liszt
Chasse-neige
(Transcendental Study No 12)
Daniil Trifonov *pf*
DG (10/16)

Although the title translates today as 'snowplough' (no such thing existed in 1852, when the piece was published), in Liszt's day it meant 'snowstorm'. It's a ferociously demanding tremolo study and a tone picture of a violent blizzard, and it's rated one of the most difficult to execute of the set of 12 studies. Few pianists have managed to capture 'Chasse-neige' quite as vividly as Daniil Trifonov, whose disc featured as *Gramophone's* Recording of the Month in October 2016.



Vaughan Williams
Symphony No 7
'Sinfonia antartica'
Margaret Ritchie *sop* John
Gielgud *narr* London Phil Ch

and Orch / Adrian Boult Naxos (5/54)
Vaughan Williams scored the 1948 biopic *Scott of the Antarctic*, and the work we know as *Sinfonia antartica*, begun in 1949 and premiered in 1953, was, he said, 'suggested by the film', with some of the themes 'derived from my incidental music to that film'. There are many excellent more recent recordings, but this classic 1953 account, supervised by the composer and with the original soprano soloist, stands the test of time.



Rautavaara
Cantus arcticus
Royal Scottish National
Orchestra / Hannu Lintu
Naxos (3/99)

Vaughan Williams uses a wind machine and a wordless women's chorus to help summon the Antarctic frozen wastes; here, in a work subtitled 'Concerto for Birds and Orchestra', Rautavaara evokes the Arctic using recordings of birds made in Finland, near the Arctic Circle. Set against an orchestral backdrop, their cries summon up bleak and desolate frozen wastes, making you want to pull on an extra layer in this spellbinding account under Finnish conductor Lintu.



Meyerbeer, arr Lambert
Les patineurs (excerpts)
Sadler's Wells Orchestra /
Constant Lambert
Somm (7/39)

Skating parties on frozen ponds in the depths of winter wouldn't be allowed today; but in Victorian times it was different – according to the synopsis of *Les patineurs*, a ballet concocted from the music of Meyerbeer's operas *Le prophète* (1849) and *L'étoile du nord* (1854). Choreographed by Frederick Ashton, it was premiered at Sadler's Wells in 1937. It's wonderful that this 1939 recording of part of it, conducted by the man who inspired the ballet and arranged the music, is available again.



Schubert
Winterreise
Gerald Finley *bar*
Julius Drake *pf*
Hyperion (4/14)

Schubert's *Winterreise* is as much about a poet's lonely love-lorn tramp through the wintry countryside as it is an allegorical journey of the heart. In the first of the 24 poems by Wilhelm Müller, the young man leaves the home of the girl he hoped to marry, setting out in winter in the dead of night to find his way in the trackless snow. Most critics agree that Finley's account, recorded in 2013, is one of the very finest in a crowded field.



Haydn
Die Jahreszeiten
Miah Persson *sop*
Jeremy Ovenden *ten*
Andrew Foster-Williams *bass*
London Symphony Chor & Orch / Colin Davis
LSO Live (9/11)

'Light and life forsake the dubious day; vital heat forsakes the dying year. Hours of pallid twilight follow long, long nights of tedious gloom.' So sings Hannah (in Neil Jenkins's translation) in the Cavatina of the 'Winter' section of *The Seasons* (1798-1801). It's hard to see why Haydn hated this oratorio in this beautifully recorded and ultimately uplifting live performance from 2010.



Tchaikovsky
Symphony No 1
'Winter Daydreams'
RLPO / Vasily Petrenko
Onyx (8/16)

No other work caused Tchaikovsky so much trouble to write, but he remained immensely fond of it throughout his life. It was begun in 1866, but its final version was not heard until 1883. It opens the new, acclaimed first volume of all the symphonies from Petrenko and his spirited, well-drilled players. The first movement is a perfect reflection of its subtitle, 'Daydreams on a Winter Journey', while the second, also programmatic, is called 'Land of Gloom, Land of Mists'.



Puccini

La bohème Anna Netrebko *sop* Rolando Villazón *ten* et al
Bavarian Radio Symphony Chorus and Orchestra / Bertrand de Billy DG (6/08)

Winter and freezing temperatures dominate all four acts of this heart-warming opera. It is Christmas Eve. In the bohemians' Parisian garret (Act 1), poet Rodolfo and painter Marcello burn the manuscript of Rodolfo's play to keep the stove going; oranges, dates and hot chestnuts are on sale in the Quartier Latin in Act 2; the

prelude to Act 3 opens in the icy dawn (harps and flutes) with traders and street sweepers stamping their feet to keep warm. Back in the garret in Act 4, Mimi is dying, her tiny hands frozen. Few other recordings of the many great ones on offer rival this superb version culled from three live concert performances in Munich in April 2007.

THE GRAMOPHONE COLLECTION

Biber's Mystery (Rosary) Sonatas

This unique set of Baroque scordatura violin sonatas inspired by the mysteries of the rosary has, finds **Fabrice Fitch**, been subjected to so many treatments – from the meditative to the risk-takingly virtuosic

Pilgrims to Mozart's birthplace in Salzburg's Getreidegasse ought to pause at the house on the corner where his 'musical great-grandfather' Heinrich Ignaz Franz von Biber died 52 years earlier – for Mozart's father, Leopold, author of the famous treatise on violin playing, worked under Biber's son, Karl Heinrich, who was Salzburg's Kapellmeister. The violin connection is important, because Biber's fame as a composer was inseparable from his renown as a violinist. Paradoxically, his most recorded work today is his only collection of violin music never to have been published in his lifetime. The date of its compilation is uncertain but can be situated between the mid-1670s and 1686. It was dedicated to the reigning Prince-Bishop, who had a special devotion to the rosary (*Rosenkranz*).

In the set's only surviving manuscript source (probably prepared under Biber's supervision), each sonata is prefaced by an engraving illustrating one of the 15 mysteries on which Catholics were enjoined to meditate while saying their rosary. These are arranged in three groups of five: first the Joyful Mysteries, next the Sorrowful Mysteries and finally the Glorious Mysteries. Thus, each sonata is implicitly assigned an extramusical programme and placed within a cycle. An extra, hand-drawn roundel gives the programme of a final sonata, 'The Guardian Angel', an elaborate unaccompanied passacaglia, based on a four-note motif (G–F–E flat–D) that is

stated 65 times and incorporates passages of two- and even three-part writing. Widely regarded as the most impressive solo violin piece before those of Bach, it crowns the cycle masterfully.

In Biber's hands, the sonata is very flexible: no two of the set are exactly alike. Most include one or more dance movements with variations, sometimes with an introduction and/or conclusion. Some are still more flexible: 'The Agony in the Garden' (No 6) is in three freely composed movements running together, and 'The Presentation in the Temple' (No 4) consists of a single chaconne. Towards the end of the cycle, the sonatas grow in scale and complexity, setting up the Passacaglia very effectively. Though virtuosity is an essential element, Biber's passagework is seldom predictable, and his ability to suggest multiple voices with just a melody line and a bass rivals that of Bach.

What lends these sonatas their mystique for violinists, however, is the use of *scordatura*, or detuned strings. 'The Annunciation' (No 1) and the Passacaglia use normal tuning, but all the other sonatas employ different ones. These make possible novel multiple-stops and contrapuntal turns, but they also significantly alter the tone of the instrument, which becomes brighter or darker to suit the programme of each sonata. The extent of the detunings is extraordinary: in several cases only an octave separates the top and bottom strings, and for 'The Resurrection' (No 11) Biber prescribes that the middle strings



actually cross over in the pegbox so that the two pairs of upper and lower strings are tuned in octaves – which leads, incidentally, to one of the most memorable moments in the entire cycle. These 'extreme' tunings are practically impossible on a modern violin, owing to its greater tension and the tension of steel strings, which tend not to hold a new tuning reliably; but the lower-tension, gut-stringed period instruments accommodate them readily. So although the first modern edition dates from 1905, it was only with the period-performance



The only surviving manuscript source of the Mystery Sonatas feature engravings to illustrate each of the 15 mysteries

movement that violinists began to take these pieces into their repertoire. Since the first modern recording in 1962, however, there have been more than two dozen.

PERFORMANCE CHOICES

Although the *Mystery Sonatas* incorporate programmatic elements and are presented as a cycle, neither concept carried the baggage for Biber's audience that they were to acquire later. So for one thing, it's most unlikely that Biber envisaged that they be performed continuously; for another, the

music isn't consistently illustrative, which is significant, given Biber's fondness for representation elsewhere. The programmes ascribed to one and the same passage by different performers make for interesting reading. Accordingly, some of the most celebrated recorded interpretations view the *Mystery Sonatas* as meditations – almost abstract spiritual exercises, whereas others privilege the music's verve, the seat-of-the-pants virtuosity that seems to demand risk-taking.

Another essential decision concerns the instrumentation: how many

instruments are on the continuo line? And how often does the scoring change? A typical number is three, consisting of keyboard (alternating harpsichord and chamber organ), lute and bowed string bass. That said, there's scant evidence for the use of bowed strings on continuo lines in German-speaking lands until the 18th century, even though most recordings do include one. Finally, the number of violins used by each performer seems less significant to me than to some of them; it ranges from one (Manze in 2003) to eight (Siedel in 2011).



Julia Wedman has one of the most attractive timbres: warm and varied

EARLY RECORDINGS

The first recordings date from the 1960s and are already very contrasted:

Susanne Lautenbacher is clear and clean but overcareful, her consistently sustained tone making her tempos seem slower than they are, the two-piece continuo static and overly present. **Eduard Melkus's** reading is more incisive and characterful (and still the joint-fastest available – with Lotter in 2004), and his continuo band is more varied, although he rarely uses more than two instruments at once on the bass-line. It is on several counts the most satisfying interpretation before Reinhard Goebel's nearly 25 years later, and even those passages that sound dated and overcooked can be charming: the *Sturm und Drang* of the final variation (which depicts an earthquake) of 'The Crucifixion' (No 10) is absurdly fun.

Fifteen years passed before **Franzjosef Maier's** recording, whose emphasis on individual notes loses the wood for the trees in bravura passages, while the

uniformly slow tempos prevent any sense of line in the dance-like or lyrical passages. The continuo section is largely passive.

It's easy to understand why **John Holloway's** *Gramophone* Award-winning account caused such a stir. For the first time, Biber was treated to the predominantly straight tone then associated with period-performance strings, and a continuo section in which lute and harp were on equal footing with organ and harpsichord. There was also something of the meditative approach mentioned earlier, aided by a relatively recessed acoustic. But time has not been kind to this recording: the sound now seems quite thin, Holloway's tuning isn't beyond reproach, and subsequent recordings have had more to say about the music.

Just a year later, **Reinhard Goebel** took Biber by the scruff of the neck. His trademark brashness is balanced by lyricism where called for (as in 'The Presentation in the Temple'). Only rarely does his

showmanship get the better of him. That said, his willingness to ornament reprises should be applauded (this is all too rare), and his economical continuo group keeps him grounded. More searching readings there may have been since Goebel's, but he set the bar at a new level technically and interpretatively: the final 'earthquake' variation in 'The Crucifixion' is as dramatic as one could wish. His notably eccentric Passacaglia, with its sudden shifts of tempo and changes of gear, may not be for everyone, but it marked Goebel's approach as a clear alternative to Holloway's at the time.

A STEADY STREAM

In hindsight, Holloway and Goebel set the tone for the subsequent discography and enshrined the *Mystery Sonatas* within the repertoire. Whereas the first five recordings appeared over nearly three decades, since 1996 they've come at an average of once a year. I have a soft spot for both **Gunar Letzbor** and **Marianne Rônez**: Letzbor stands first in the line of eccentrics who flirt with excess and seemingly relish cocking a snook at purists – particularly in the matter of continuo lineup, whose chopping and changing can be very distracting. But for those who don't mind the technicolour lenses, he offers character in spades and an alluringly full tone. Rônez is technically more limited, but her acidulated tone conveys the pathos of the Sorrowful Mysteries as do few others (try the unison variation in Sonata No 7, 'The Scourging', in which the melody is played entirely across two strings – a high point of the set). The sound image formed with her subtle continuo band is pleasingly compact and intimate.

The years clustered around Biber's 300th death-anniversary in 2004 brought a clutch of recordings of variable distinctiveness. One can say little about **Walter Reiter's** account, beset with technical problems and interpretatively unfocused. Not infrequently in these sonatas, the balance between soloist and continuo creates problems: the sound recording on **Alice Piérot's** otherwise attractive reading for Alpha is so skewed in

THE 'MEDITATIVE' OPTION

Wedman Sono Luminus (M) ② DSL92127

This is one of the most rounded accounts and a clear contrast to Lotter, with a warm tone that one doesn't tire of hearing and



a sympathetic continuo group. There's mounting other-worldliness as the cycle nears its end, and by the close of the concluding Passacaglia a clear sense of arrival.

THE 'HISTORICAL' RECORDING

Goebel Archiv Produktion (M) ② 431 656-2AH2

May Goebel forgive me for bestowing the 'historical' tag on him, but his recording has been enormously influential. Everything's

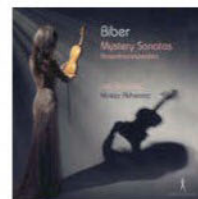


in place, served up with his trademark panache, a lithe continuo group with the cello a discreet presence, and the zaniest Passacaglia on record.

THE WILD CARD

Tur Bonet Pan (F) ② PC10329

The sense of occasion, of a sharing of musical ideas in abundance, makes this set special. Of the more eccentric



readings of the *Mystery Sonatas*, it's to this one that I have returned most willingly. And you get to hear a claviorganum!

the ensemble's favour as to rob the violin of pre-eminence (a real shame, since the continuo is lively and inventive, and includes a wonderful claviorganum). **Patrick Bismuth's** accompanists are prone to be more self-indulgent than Piérot's (try the beginning of the *Allegro* from 'The Annunciation'), and the soloist's tone is less varied, his interpretation less characterful.

Elizabeth Wallfisch has the opposite problem: her continuo section is understated to the point of diffidence, while the bass viol in **Pavlo Besnoziuk's** recording is overly present (once again a matter of recording). Both soloists acquit themselves well, but struggle to make a strong impression in a crowded field. In Besnoziuk's recital, the actor Timothy West introduces each sonata with a commentary on its spiritual programme. I was initially sceptical, but West, solemn without being portentous, pitches the readings just right. **Monica Huggett** (who recorded the set in two parts, featuring Nos 1–9 and 10–16 respectively, of which only Volume 2 is currently available) takes a more positive line, her tone light and airy. The rapport with her continuo section is very close (the scoring changes for each sonata), though the *Sturm und Drang* at 'The Descent of the Holy Ghost' (No 13) isn't quite as tumultuous as intended. The approach is dynamic ('The Resurrection' invigorating), and although one might wish for more heft and forward motion (for example, at the conclusion of No 9, 'The Carrying of the Cross' – which is on Volume 1), hers is a sensitive, thoughtful account.

DITCHING BOWED CONTINUO

Recorded within months of each other, **Andrew Manze** and the relatively unheralded **Rüdiger Lotter** take the rare but historically informed step of generally dispensing with bowed continuo (however, Manze does add a cello to Sonata No 12, 'The Ascension', which is the only one of the set that in the original manuscript explicitly calls for a bowed bass): for Manze, Richard Egarr alternates organ and harpsichord, and Lotter adds a lute to the keyboardist. But there the similarities end: Manze's interpretation is one of the lengthiest, while Lotter's is joint-fastest (with Melkus in 1967). For all that, Lotter doesn't give the impression of indulging in speed for speed's sake; rather, the omission of a viol trims the ensemble radically and makes for a closer integration of soloist and ensemble, making this one of the most consistently satisfying performances available. That it's a live recording (albeit over two concerts) makes the achievement all the more impressive, given the changes of *scordatura*. There are



A copper engraving of Biber from 1681

a few short phrases missing in subsidiary cross-string counterpoints, but these are rare and seem a small price to pay, for otherwise the reading's practically faultless. Where Lotter uses three violins (to negotiate the retunings in live concert), Manze makes a point of sticking to a single instrument. He is technically unimpeachable, his view of the work is deeply considered and thoughtful; like Holloway's, it won a *Gramophone* Award. But as hinted earlier, the detached attitude seems to me to miss something essential: for one thing, the music is rooted in dance rhythms, and for another, why play down illustrative touches

when they occur? Ironically, on the one occasion when Manze goes out of the way to embrace representation ('The Descent of the Holy Ghost'), the result is overdrawn, almost forced.

THE PAST DECADE

The remaining recordings have been issued in the last decade. Neither **Anne Schumann** nor **Annegret Siedel** manages to get beyond the music's technical challenges – a pity, as the Berlin Classics issue includes an elegant colour facsimile of the recently identified print from which the engravings of the original manuscript were taken.

Ariadne Daskalakis is readier to take risks, albeit at the cost of rough edges here and there (some sonorities in 'The Crucifixion' cross the line into poor taste), and the three-piece Ensemble Vintage Köln are unobtrusive accompanists, in the best sense. But I'd tend to agree with Lindsay Kemp that the overall experience isn't as absorbing as one might wish.

Daniel Sepec is more secure overall, testifying to the incremental rise in quality of this latest batch of recordings. Granted, his 'quirkiness quotient' is low compared with other recent offerings (of which more presently), but his companionable, light tone and his rapport with his continuo lineup (again, a three-piece) make him an engaging guide: the military tones of

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

DATE / ARTISTS	RECORD COMPANY (REVIEW DATE)
1962 Lautenbacher <i>vn</i> Ewerhart <i>org/hpd/regal</i> Koch <i>va da gamba</i>	Vox ⑤ CDX5171 (9/64*)
1967 Melkus <i>vn</i> Dreyfus <i>hpd</i> Rogg <i>org</i> Scheit <i>lute</i> Lange <i>bn</i> Sonneck <i>vc</i> Planyavsky <i>db</i> Archiv ⑤ 477 7209ACO2 (8/68*)	
1982/83 Maier <i>vn</i> Lehnrdorfer <i>org</i> Junghänel <i>theo</i> Engel <i>vc/va da gamba</i>	DHM ⑤ 2 88875 06321-2 (4/89*)
1989 Holloway <i>vn</i> Moroney <i>org/hpd</i> Tragicomedia	Virgin ⑤ 2 562062-2 (5/91*)
1990 Goebel <i>vn</i> Cologne Musica Antiqua	Archiv ⑤ 431 656-2AH2 (10/91); ⑤ 7 479 1957AB7 (1/14)
1996 Letzbor <i>vn</i> Ars Antiqua Austria	Challenge Classics ⑤ CC72676 (9/15); Arcana ⑤ 2 A381
1998 Rónez <i>vn</i> Affetti Musicali	Winter & Winter ⑤ 2 910 029-2 (5/99)
1999–2000 Reiter <i>vn</i> Cordaria	Signum ⑤ 2 SIGCD021 (3/02)
2002 Piérot <i>vn</i> Veilleurs de Nuit	Alpha ⑤ 2 2 ALPHAO38 (7/04)
2003 Beznoziuk <i>vn</i> Roblou <i>hpd</i> Chateaufort <i>theo</i> Tunncliffe <i>va da gamba</i>	Avie ⑤ 2 AV0038 (7/04)
2003 Bismuth <i>vn</i> Tempesta	Zig-Zag Territoires ⑤ 2 ZT040801
2003 Manze <i>vn</i> Egarr <i>org/hpd</i> McGillivray <i>vc</i>	Harmonia Mundi ⑤ 2 HMU90 7321/2 (3/05)
2003–04 Huggett <i>vn</i> Sonnerie	Vol 1: ASV CDGAU350 - nla; Vol 2: ASV ⑤ 2 CDGAU351 (both 3/05)
2004 Lotter <i>vn</i> Lyriarte	Oehms ⑤ 2 OC514
2005 E Wallfisch <i>vn</i> Kent <i>org</i> Hunt <i>vc</i>	ABC ⑤ 2 ABC476 6831 (4/09)
2005–06 Minasi <i>vn</i> Bizzarrie Armoniche	Arts ⑤ 2 47735-8
2006 Homburger <i>vn</i> Camerata Kilkenny	Maya ⑤ 2 MCD0603
2007 Schumann <i>vn</i> Knebel <i>orgs</i>	Querstand ⑤ 3 VKJK1423/1506/1507 (oas)
2009 Sepec <i>vn</i> Behringer <i>org/hpd</i> Santana <i>archlute</i> /theo Perl <i>va da gamba</i>	Coviello ⑤ 2 COV21008 (3/11)
2010 Wedman <i>vn</i> Nediger <i>hpd/org</i> Seager Scott <i>hp</i> Harris <i>archlute</i> /theo Deak <i>vc/va da gamba</i>	Sono Luminus ⑤ 2 DSL92127 (7/11)
2011 Siedel <i>vn</i> Bell'arte Salzburg	Berlin Classics ⑤ 2 0300531BC (7/13)
2013 Daskalakis <i>vn</i> Ensemble Vintage Köln	BIS ⑤ 2 BIS2096 (10/15)
2013 Kaakinen-Pilch <i>vn</i> Battalia	Online ⑤ 2 ODE1243-2D (9/14)
2014 Schmitt <i>vn</i> Guerrier <i>claviorg</i> Moscardo <i>archlute</i> Mañalich <i>bass viol</i> Krigovsky <i>violone</i> Aeolus ⑤ 2 AEI0256 (11/16)	
2015 Podger <i>vn</i> Świątkiewicz <i>hpd/org</i> Miller <i>theo/archlute</i> Manson <i>vc/va da gamba</i>	Channel Classics ⑤ 2 CCSSA37315 (10/15)
2015 Tur Bonet <i>vn</i> Musica Alchemica	Pan ⑤ 2 PC10329 (10/15)

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Pictured: Jonas Kaufmann (© Sony Classical/Julian Hargreaves/Nessun Dorma - The Puccini Album 2015) who featured on the July 2015 cover of Gramophone. Full annual retail price for print only (13 issues) is £74.75; print only annual subscription, Digital Edition and reviews Database (£64); Digital Club (£84); Gramophone Club (£106). Postage and packaging is not included for overseas orders. Overseas subscription p&p: Europe £22.80, Rest of World £27.00. If you have a subscription enquiry then please email subscriptions@markallengroup.com



Rü diger Lotter: forgoes a string bass on the continuo for a stunning recording

'The Ascension', for instance, are very well captured. A similarly well-crafted alternative comes from **Sirkka-Liisa Kaakinen-Pilch** and the well-named Battalia ensemble: Kaakinen-Pilch just edges it over Sepec technically, and she's an expressive player with a slightly fuller tone. At times, however (particularly in the Sorrowful Mysteries), the continuo's jangling grates on the ear – disconcertingly, given its minimalist presence elsewhere.

A worthy successor to Manze, **Rachel Podger** draws out the more plangent sonatas to good effect, and 'The Crucifixion' variations show off her dexterity, the final 'earthquake' variation building to an effective climax. Her relatively neutral stance was noted with some surprise by LK, but those who favour the meditative option may prefer her to Manze, especially given the questing, inventive continuo section.

Maya Homburger and **Julia Wedman** share elements of that approach in their relaxed tempos, though both treat their continuo more flexibly than do either Manze or Podger. Homburger's lavish continuo lineup changes almost continually and is on the heavy side, and though she sets little store by 'authenticity', even her quirkier choices bear repeated listening. Her approach is comparatively measured (particularly in the Joyful Mysteries), but when she wishes to be flashy and incisive she carries it off. Above all, she has the chops to match the best performances, and always has something to say about the music: the moment of Resurrection has a touch of magic about it.

(That said, Barry Guy's jazz-induced double-bass riffs in 'The Crucifixion' variations may well be a bridge too far.) Wedman deploys her fine continuo band with similar freedom (the bass viol appears on its own for 'The Nativity'), though with less chopping and changing within variation sets. To my ear, hers is one of the most attractive timbres to be heard in Biber: warm, enveloping and varied. In the Glorious Mysteries in particular the other-worldly quality of her playing comes into its own, and the concluding Passacaglia is wonderful in both architecture and detail, one of the best that's to be had.

Both **Lina Tur Bonet** and **Riccardo Minasi** sit on the eccentric wing of performance options: Tur Bonet takes few prisoners in her quest for immediacy, flirting convincingly with ugliness when necessary (as in 'The Scourging' or 'The Presentation in the Temple'). The continuo work, though unusually detailed at times (a touch overpresent, too), is equally capable of restraint, making Tur Bonet's recording one of the most immediately approachable. Her joyful approach is infectious, and imaginative touches abound, including more ornamentation than one's used to (something she shares with Minasi and Goebel, and for which, once again, brava!). The blend of the violin and the regal stop for 'The Crowning with Thorns' (No 8) and 'The Crucifixion' really works, and the ensuing variations are bitingly acerbic, as surely they ought to be; in 'The Carrying of the Cross', the sense of transcendent

weariness is unmistakable, and the dancing, high continuo as the Virgin ascends to heaven is a delight.

Minasi gets off to a slightly choppy start, but there are high points of real individuality and lyricism (as at the conclusion of No 5, 'The Finding in the Temple'). The continuo's participation varies greatly, being overly present at times and matching the violin's lightness of touch at others. The use of a sackbut for the borrowed hymn in 'The Resurrection' imparts a certain majesty. The concluding Passacaglia has some exquisite touches, and although some may find his gear changes extreme, Minasi reins them in just in time. Finally, and the most recently released, **Hélène Schmitt** rediscovers a sense of breadth (hers is one of the lengthiest accounts to date) at the expense of the cycle's inherent virtuosity.

TOWARDS A FINAL CUT

My top choices accommodate as contrasted a set of views as possible. Among early recordings, Goebel is the obvious choice, not least because the discography really can be read as 'pre-Goebel' and 'post-Goebel'. Another clear front-runner is Wedman, for all the reasons given above and because she credibly represents the meditative approach without exhibiting the detachment that troubles me with its more famous exponents. Among the straighter readings, Kakkinnen-Pilch also deserves a mention, but the most vexing choice concerns the large group of performances that treat the continuo wilfully flexibly: Minasi, Letzbor, Homburger and Tur Bonet all have a clear vision for the cycle. But since choose I must, my wild card selection is Tur Bonet for the sheer communicativeness of her enthusiasm and her many imaginative insights. The top choice is similarly fraught (depending on one's preferences, Wedman would be perfectly credible), but finally goes to Lotter, who delivers the goods with great elegance, minimal artifice and a live performance to boot. It's a good place to experience the magic of Biber's *Mystery Sonatas* for the first time; but if you can, try all four. ⑥

TOP CHOICE

Lotter Oehms ⑤ ② OC514

The term 'authenticity' is frowned on today, but Lotter's decision to forego a string bass on the continuo pays dividends. After his, most



other performances seem unwontedly heavy, even stage-managed. Biber's seemingly fierce demands are dispatched with quicksilver elegance.

PERFORMANCES & EVENTS

Presenting live concert and opera performances from around the world, and reviews of archived music-making available online to stream when you want, where you want

Wigmore Hall, London & BBC Radio 3

Richard Egarr performs Blow, Byrd and Purcell, January 9

This Radio 3 lunchtime concert sees Richard Egarr perform a Byrd, Blow and Purcell harpsichord programme, demonstrating the breadth of invention at play in English composers' keyboard works during the Tudor and Stuart eras, and how they drew on the past to create their new models. Crowning the programme are virtuosic suites from Purcell, plus his Ground in D minor.

wigmore-hall.org.uk, bbc.co.uk/radio3

Old Swan Hotel, Harrogate & online

Pianist Martin Roscoe and Francesca Dego perform at the Harrogate International Festivals' Sunday Series, January 15 and 29

Running on Sundays between January 15 and April 30, the Harrogate International Festivals' Sunday Series presents major musicians in the intimate venue of Harrogate's Old Swan Hotel. Pianist Martin Roscoe kicks off the 2017 series on January 15 with a programme to include Bach's *French Suite* No 5 in G, Beethoven's

Les Adieux Piano Sonata, Op 81a, and Poulenc's *Trois Novelettes*. Then on January 29 the festival welcomes new young talent in the form of violinist Francesca Dego, joined by her regular recital partner Francesca Leonardi, to perform Beethoven's *Kreutzer* Sonata and Respighi's Violin Sonata in B minor. Leonardi's concert will be live-streamed as part of the festivals' new Library of Live initiative.

harrogateinternationalfestivals.com

Kulturforum, Berlin & online

German National Youth Orchestra collaborates with German National Youth Ballet, January 16

This free concert on the Berlin Philharmonic's Digital Concert Hall streaming site is a perfect opportunity to hear the professional-standard German National Youth Orchestra, whose alumni include Christian Tetzlaff and Alban Gerhardt. They're joined by the German National Youth Ballet, (choreography by John Neumeier) for a programme celebrating the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation, which falls this year.

Mendelssohn's *Reformation* Symphony opens the evening, before a new commission from Michel van der Aa. Next comes JS Bach's Orchestral Suite in D, BWV1068. The evening then concludes with a bang, and returns full circle, with Enjott Schneider's 2010 symphonic poem on Luther's famous chorale, *Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott*, which Mendelssohn also quoted in his *Reformation* Symphony. Alexander Shelley conducts.

digitalconcerthall.com

Carnegie Hall, New York & WQXR

Daniel Barenboim conducts a Bruckner symphony cycle, January 19 - 29

If you enjoyed - or missed - hearing Daniel Barenboim and the Staatskapelle Berlin performing Bruckner's Fourth and Sixth Symphonies alongside Mozart piano concertos at the BBC Proms this year, they're now performing all nine symphonies chronologically at Carnegie Hall. This is the first time the hall is presenting a complete Bruckner symphony cycle in the space of one season. Six of them will be partnered

ONLINE CONCERT REVIEW

A conductor to watch takes on Rachmaninov's Second Symphony with the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra

Rachmaninov

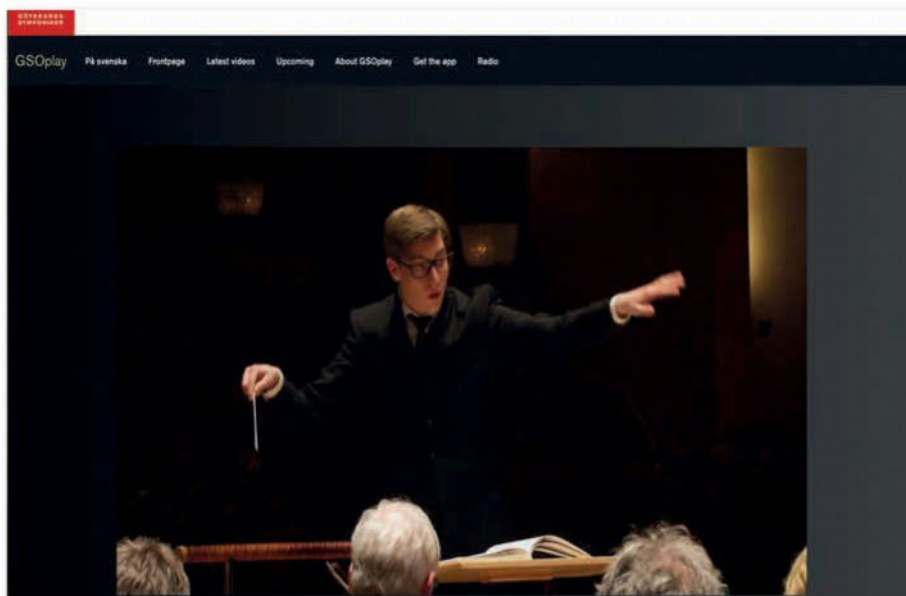
The Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra has a track record when it comes to identifying and contracting young talent. Here we get a glimpse not of the ensemble's new Music Director Santtu-Matias Rouvali but of his fellow Finn Klaus Mäkelä. Young? You bet: Mäkelä was barely 21 when this concert was captured on the last day of November, which makes him Rouvali's junior by over a decade.

But Mäkelä has presence on the podium - tall, clean cut, his gestures a little tighter than Rouvali's but with something of his colleague's excitability. Rachmaninov's Second might not demand the life experience of a Mahler symphony but its gloom-to-triumph trajectory needs to be plotted carefully and on the whole Mäkelä manages. He includes the first movement's exposition repeat and the timpani thud at the movement's end.

The GSO's weighty corporate sound can make it sound slightly Slavic although its wind and brass are notably subtle, with gorgeous, fragile clarinet solos and an atmospheric, fur-wrapped ensemble horn

sound. Mäkelä doesn't exploit Rachmaninov's copious dynamic markings as Antonio Pappano does on his Santa Cecilia/Warner Classics recording (perhaps an unfair comparison in terms of both media and personnel), but he does well on basics -

all the symphony's various fluctuations and perorations. Beautiful, interesting and entertaining but not an imposing interpretation by any means. **Andrew Mellor**
Available to view for free until December 1, 2017
at gso.se/en/gsoplay/



ONLINE OPERA REVIEW

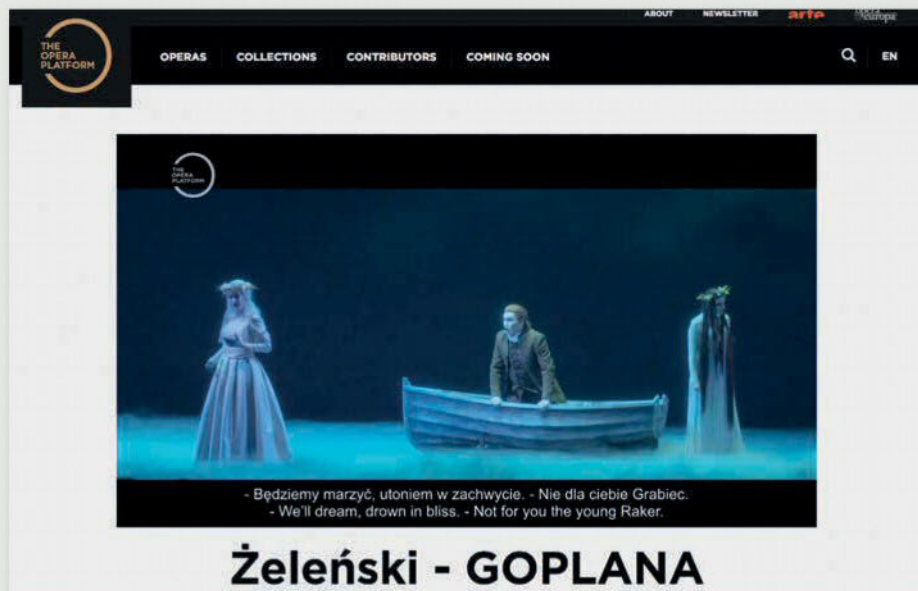
A Polish rarity, *Goplana*, comes up well in an authoritative performance from Polish National Opera

Żeleński

On the strength of four operas of which *Goplana* is the second, premiered in Krakow in 1896, Władysław Żeleński (1837-1921) was the most significant Polish composer for the stage in the generation between Moniuszko and Szymanowski.

On both musical and dramatic terms, this fairy tale with a twist belongs to a mystical realm between the bitterly human kings and fairies of Dvořák's *Rusalka* and the spiritually elevated court of Magnard's *Guercoeur*. The title-role of a devilish water-nymph makes exigent demands of a high lyric soprano with fearless coloratura which Edyta Piasecka answers with compelling authority. Strongest among a consistent supporting cast are the mezzo-soprano Malgorzata Walewska (in a tormented, Kostelnička-like part as a Widow) and the tenor Arnold Rutkowski as the ineffectual Prince for whose affections the Widow's two daughters vie with jugs of raspberries and fatal consequences.

A heavily stylised naturalistic production uses an uncluttered stage to sort out the plot's often-superfluous intricacy and



majors on Goth eye makeup, dry ice and suits of plastic armour like a low-rent *Lobengrin*. The Chorus and Orchestra of the Polish Opera in Warsaw acquit themselves with impressive fluency under the experienced direction of Grzegorz Nowak, who is ever sensible of the tendency for so detailed an orchestral

score, which looks more to French than German models, to overwhelm the singers, though in this case the close stage miking helps. It's an unmissable treat for opera collectors.

Peter Quantrell

Available to stream free until May 2, 2017 at theoperaplatform.eu

with Mozart piano concertos directed from the keyboard by Barenboim, and the January 23 concert will be broadcast live and online on WQXR. Tying in to all this, Deutsche Grammophon this month releases Barenboim and the Staatskapelle Berlin's complete Bruckner symphonies – currently on Barenboim's digital Peral Music label and reviewed last June – as a box-set. carnegiehall.org, wqxr.org

Metropolitan Opera, New York & cinemas worldwide

Diana Damrau and Vittorio Grigolo star in *Romeo and Juliette*, January 21

This Met 'Live in HD' cinema performance sees Diana Damrau and Vittorio Grigolo in the title-roles for Bartlett Sher's 2008 production of Gounod's Shakespearean tragedy under the baton of Gianandrea Nosedà. This is a role debut for Damrau, who is also marking her 11th consecutive season at the Met, while Grigolo has already sung the role under Sher's direction, at La Scala, Milan. When they last appeared together on the Met stage in 2015, for *Manon*, the *New York Times* commented on their onstage chemistry. So, this should be an exciting evening's drama.

metopera.org

Saffron Hall, Saffron Walden & BBC Radio 3 Radio 3 Big Chamber Weekend, January 21 & 22

Anyone who hasn't yet enjoyed the relatively new Saffron Hall's extraordinarily good acoustic first hand should consider a trip for this chamber music weekend curated by BBC Radio 3. Sara Mohr-Pietsch introduces recitals from pianist Christian Ihle Hadland and three musicians with whom he collaborates closely, violinist Boris Brovtsyn, viola-player Lars Anders Tomter and cellist Adrian Brendel. Each concert is also being recorded for future broadcast.

saffronhall.com, bbc.co.uk/radio3

Lighthouse, Poole & live on BBC Radio 3 Back in the USSR with the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, January 25

Valery Sokolov performs Prokofiev's Violin Concerto No 2 with the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra under the baton of Chief Conductor Kirill Karabits. From its ardent lyricism Karabits and the BSO then move to Shostakovich's pessimistic-sounding (much as Shostakovich argued it signified the opposite) Symphony No 8, meaning that while it's an all-Russian evening, it's very much also an evening of contrasts.

bsolive.com, bbc.co.uk/radio3

Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, London & UK cinemas

Verdi's *Il trovatore*, January 31

Last summer Gianandrea Nosedà conducted Covent Garden's new, visually rich production of *Il trovatore* from David Bösch. Now it's back (already!), this time under the baton of Richard Farnes, and this particular evening is being broadcast live into cinemas around the UK. Lianna Haroutounian makes a welcome return to the role of Leonora, but otherwise it's all change for the rest of the cast, with Gregory Kunde singing Manrico, Dmitri Hvorostovsky is Count di Luna and Anita Rachvelishvili is Azucena.

roh.org.uk

Royal Festival Hall, London & BBC Radio 3 Sir Roger Norrington conducts Haydn's *The Creation*, February 4

The London Philharmonic Orchestra and Choir welcome a stellar line-up of guest artists for this performance of Haydn's *Creation* (or *Die Schöpfung* as it's being sung in German) that BBC Radio 3 will record for broadcast on February 13. Sir Roger Norrington conducts, and the soloists are soprano Susan Gritton, tenor Thomas Hobbs and baritone Christopher Maltman.

lpo.org.uk, bbc.co.uk/radio3

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THIS MONTH Arcam updates its impressive Solo Music system, CD in miniature from Marantz, and looking back on a year of outstanding products.
Andrew Everard, Audio Editor

JANUARY TEST DISCS



The Dunedin Consort's recording of Bach's *Christmas Oratorio* on Linn not only sounds wonderful but is entirely captivating.



As an example of what an orchestra can do with an 'own-label' recording, this hi-res Debussy set from San Francisco takes some beating. Magical!

'The speaker that's also a complete system'

A complete approach to streaming is part of the appeal of the latest design from speaker company KEF



When is a loudspeaker not a loudspeaker? When it's much more than just another speaker – and that's certainly the case with the new KEF LS50 Wireless from the British company KEF **1**. Based on the innovative and acclaimed original LS50, the idea behind this new model is to create a speaker that's also a complete system: as well as having powerful active amplification built into the new £2000/pr design, it is also a complete network audio solution, able to stream music from computers or network storage solutions.

The LS50 Wireless is only slightly larger than the original passive speaker, the extra depth accommodating the additional electronics, and it shares the same KEF UniQ concentric drive unit, which has a tweeter in the 'throat' of the mid/bass driver. This driver is available in a range of colours, as part of three finishes available on the LS50 Wireless: gloss black with a blue driver, gloss white/copper or titanium grey/red. As well as network streaming, the speakers have Bluetooth with aptX, an asynchronous USB input for computer connection and both optical digital and analogue inputs. A dedicated iOS or Android app allows detailed adjustments to optimise the sound for different rooms and the position of the



speakers, and offers both basic and expert adjustment ranges.

Linn has upgraded its flagship Klimax DS network music player with an all-new digital-to-analogue conversion technology, called Katalyst **2**. It's now standard in the £13,300 player and available as an upgrade for existing owners, and addresses five key areas of performance in the search for the most accurate output. A new stable reference voltage is provided to generate signal amplitude without variation; independent, isolated power supplies are used to reduce distortion; a data-optimisation stage is designed to eliminate errors in the incoming signal; a new high-precision clock with its own power supply is used; and a new ultra-low distortion output driver is employed to make the final signal less susceptible to noise and degradation.

It wouldn't be an audio news page without a new Pro-Ject turntable, so regularly does the Vienna-based company launch new models, and this month's is the £239 Essential III **3**. The new model comes complete with a high-gloss plinth in a choice of red, black or white, mounted on compliant feet, and the company's upgraded Acryl-IT E platter with a stainless steel/bronze/Teflon bearing for smoothness of operation. There's improved grounding and an aluminium pulley for the motor, and the new model comes fitted with Ortofon's OM 10 cartridge, which



is a step up from the OM 5E used on the previous Essential II model. It's mounted in an 8.6in tonearm with sapphire bearings.

Talking of turntables, there's a new range of cables for use with record players from the Kilmarnock-based company Atlas Cables **4**, available either with RCA phono plugs for those turntables providing such outputs, or with DIN plugs – either straight or right-angled – to fit straight to popular tonearms. Two cable grades are available, with Element cables starting at £85 for a one-metre set, and Hyper from £190, the latter using higher-purity copper and an improved dielectric material. Both types of cable are handbuilt and fitted with non-magnetic, solder-free Atlas Integra RCA plugs, and come with a separate spade-terminated ground lead.

Finally this month, a new brand and a new product. The £1499 Aerix Duet launches at the beginning of 2017 and combines CD playback, wireless DLNA and DTS Play-Fi, Bluetooth and FM radio **5**. It's designed as an all-in-one music system and uses a speaker designed for 360-degree sound using two 38mm drivers, each driven by its own 50W amplifier, and a 13.5cm subwoofer with a 200W amp. The system also includes a range of streaming music services including Deezer, Pandora, Spotify and Tidal, and has a built-in clock/alarm function allowing the user to be woken by the FM radio. **6**

● REVIEW PRODUCT OF THE MONTH

Arcam Solo Music

The latest generation of Arcam's all-in-one audio system is its most convincing to date, with a wide range of streaming and playback options

Ten years have passed since Arcam launched its Solo system, a complete music playback to which one only had to add speakers – or what we used to call a CD receiver, complete with player, tuner and amplification. It wasn't the first of its kind by a long chalk – after all, mini and micro systems offering similar facilities had been around for a while – but the Arcam was designed to offer the sort of performance usually associated with separate components, plus the simplicity of an 'all-in-one' package.

However, the audio landscape has changed radically since the arrival of that first Solo model, and these days music is as likely to come to a hi-fi system from a portable device via Bluetooth or Apple AirPlay as from a CD; home networks can store and deliver music for playback; and of course we have the seemingly unstoppable rise of subscription-based streaming services offering huge music libraries for instant access. Spotify and Tidal may be the best-known of these but there are many, many more, from hi-res offerings such as Qobuz to all manner of other services targeted at particular parts of the world, or specialising in particular musical genres.

So the demands placed on any system claiming to be 'complete' have expanded exponentially, although Arcam addressed one need early on by diverging the Solo line into audio-only Music models and Movie devices also able to play video discs and deliver either 2.1- or 5.1-channel sound. Recently, however, it has completely relaunched what was beginning to look like a slightly tired range, with



ARCAM SOLO MUSIC

Type Network music system

Price £1299

Built-in sources CD/SACD player, Bluetooth audio, UPnP/DLNA streaming, FM/DAB/DAB+ tuner, internet radio

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Outputs One pair of speakers, headphones, HDMI

Output power 80Wpc into 8 ohms, 125Wpc into 4 ohms

Accessories supplied Learning remote handset

Dimensions (WxHxD) 42x8.5x40cm
arcam.co.uk

new versions of both Music and Movie models, newly designed Muso speakers and subwoofer, and even a Solo Bar for those who just want a simple plug-and-play upgrade for their TV's sound.

What we have here is the third-generation Solo Music, first unveiled at the end of 2015 and selling for £1299. As well as a CD/SACD player, it has a DAB/DAB+/FM radio tuner and four HDMI inputs for the sound from video sources plus a monitor output. External sources are also catered for via

line analogue and optical/digital inputs – one of each – plus an extra 3.5mm stereo line input. There's an Ethernet network connection for streaming from computers, NAS drives, internet radio and online services, as well as twin rubber antennae for Wi-Fi and Bluetooth, and a rear-panel socket to which USB storage can be connected for playback of its contents. The 2x80W amplifier drives speakers through a single set of stereo speaker outputs, and there are also connections for a subwoofer and

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SUGGESTED PARTNERS

The Arcam offers a comprehensive package of features, so all you need add is...

APPLE iPhone 7

Control of the Solo Music is simple using a smartphone or tablet: the new Apple iPhone 7 offers a good combination of usable screen size with music playback



MONITOR AUDIO BRONZE 5

The Arcam Solo Music has the power to drive a wide range of speakers: affordable floorstanders such as the Monitor Audio Bronze 5 would be a great choice



a pair of headphones, with sockets for an external infrared receiver, RS232 home automation control and a DAB/FM aerial completing the connectivity.

In the style of several other modern systems, the Solo Music divides its controls between the front panel and the top, with not much more than input selection and basic disc transport controls on the fascia, and menu access, navigation keys and the volume control up top. There's also a comprehensive remote handset able to learn the commands for other system components, and the inevitable app for extended system control, available on both Android and iOS platforms. The arrival of the Solo Music review sample coincided with an update of this MusicLife app, along with new firmware for the unit itself, bringing Tidal and Qobuz streaming at up to full CD resolution (subject to subscription), as well as access to internet radio and podcasts.

The Arcam was designed to offer the sort of performance usually associated with separate components

At the heart of the Solo Music is the same Class G amplifier technology Arcam uses in its higher-end integrated amps and power amps: this is designed to maintain the purity of the sound at normal listening levels, while keeping in reserve the audio equivalent of a turbocharger for use when high playback settings or the dynamics of the music require. That's the very simple explanation, but it works to superb effect in the likes of the hefty A49 amplifier, and its inclusion here bodes well for the Solo Music's sound quality.

PERFORMANCE

It took a little while to get to grips with the new MusicLife app: in general it's like many UPnP apps for streaming to such products – and indeed was able to stream to my usual Naim players! – but the extra features including Tidal, Qobuz and internet radio are hidden away under an 'airable' tab. Once I'd got that worked out I was in business, and able to stream both online content and my music library,

not to mention listen to Radio 3 via the internet service.

The Solo Music will play a wide range of formats, either from a network connection or USB memory, or burnt to CD-R/RW disc, which the disc section supports along with CDs and SACDs. Files at up to 192kHz/24bit can be played in FLAC, WAV, AIFF and OGG; up to 96kHz/24bit in AAC; MP3 to 320kbps 48kHz; and WMA to 192kbps 48kHz. For most users the formats at CD and beyond will probably be of most interest, but the system does sound reasonable enough with 320kbps mp3, should you have music stored in that format for portable use, for example.

That done, the Arcam delivers a presentation that's very much in the mould of the company's other Class G amplifiers, in that it does sound smooth and sweet at low levels or with delicate music, but has no shortage of punch and attack when the content demands. It's capable of delivering surprising impact and slam with large-scale orchestral works, making them both thrilling and substantial, and is as adept when playing SACDs as it is when streaming content from network storage.

That warm, rich sound has long been an Arcam trait, and is heard to good effect in the recent San Francisco symphony set of Debussy under Michael Tilson Thomas, which is available as a 'hi-res' download. The Arcam allows the scale of the music to come through remarkably well, but at the same time has the speed and rhythmic acuity the playing demands. Similarly with the fine detail of the Dunedin Consort's fabulous recording of Bach's *Christmas Oratorio*, on Linn, that sense of sweetness and fluidity, but with effortless power on tap, is extremely captivating, and lets the music progress in an entirely natural-sounding manner. Even Radio 3 via internet radio is extremely enjoyable, despite the limited bit-rate, the warmth of the Arcam flattering what can sometimes sound a shade parched and fragile.

Like past Arcam Solo offerings, this latest version of the Music system is both sonically adept and easy to use, meaning it's a compelling buy for what remains very sensible money. **G**

Or you could try...

The Arcam offers a pretty comprehensive specification for the money but it's not without competition, albeit with slightly different feature-sets

Novafidelity X12

For example, the Novafidelity range offers similar network audio capabilities, right the way up from the little X12 model, which offers built-in CD ripping and a choice of internal storage options as well as network audio streaming and playback, and has built-in 60Wpc amplification. You can buy a version with 1TB of storage onboard from under £600 – see novafidelity.co.uk for more details.



Musical Fidelity M6 Encore

At the other extreme is the Musical Fidelity M6 Encore range, reviewed in these pages last month, which has internal ripping and storage as well as internet radio and more. It starts from £3299 for the Encore Connect version, designed to be used with external amplifiers, while the Encore 225 with built-in amplification is £3999. More info at musicalfidelity.com.



Naim Uniti Atom

Closer in price to the Arcam is the Uniti Atom from Naim, which is the compact half-width network music player model in the new Uniti range, selling for £1600 or so. It doesn't have a built-in disc drive but you can connect an inexpensive USB CD drive – about £30 – and copy music to a connected USB drive. The Atom can then play it or even stream it to other Uniti, Mu-so or Naim ND- players on your network. See naimaudio.com for more information.



● REVIEW MARANTZ HD-CD1

Up-to-date CD player builds on convention

The latest in the reborn Music Link series plays to one of Marantz's major strengths: it may be compact but it performs beautifully

Marantz has always been good at CD players. As it was under the wing of Philips at the time the format was launched, it was unsurprisingly one of the very first companies on the market with a player, the legendary CD-63 being acclaimed as the first high-end machine to be available. Another CD-63, this time the CD-63MkII KI-Signature, was also a celebrated Marantz hit: taking an existing machine and tuning it for enhanced performance moved both the player and the designer behind it, Ken Ishiwata, centre stage in the minds of audiophiles in many markets.

Since then Marantz has made many much-loved CD players, from the CD-10 and CD-7 right the way through to the SA-11 machine, now in its latest 'S3' guise. And there's something even more striking in the wings, in the form of the SA-10: due on sale at the beginning of 2017, this promises to be the culmination of a long adventure with players and the technology behind SACD. All formats will be upsampled to DSD256/11.2MHz and then passed through an ultra-simple conversion system – well, it's actually little more than a low-pass filter – based on the original Philips Bitstream technology.

But Marantz hasn't forgotten its core market. It recently launched the very mainstream CD6006 machine, and now comes the latest addition to its 'designer' MusicLink range, the £449 HD-CD1. Combining a compact size with high-quality casework trimmed with wood-effect side-panels, the new player joins the HD-DAC1 digital converter/headphone amp and HD-AMP1 integrated amplifier.

The MusicLink branding is another nod to the past, and the line-up of compact high-end components the company made under that name in the early 1990s. There was a CD player in that range, too, in the form of the glass-lidded – and very covetable – CD-23, but while the HD-CD1 is rather more conventional, having a drawer-loading transport (fronted with that same wood-effect), it's also bang up to date when it comes to its specifications. As well as being a CD player, the HD-CD1 is also designed to be used as digital transport when paired with the matching HD-AMP1. There are both analogue and optical/coaxial digital outputs, while cabled remote control



MARANTZ HD-CD1

Type CD player

Price £449

Discs played CD, CD-R/RW, PCM/WMA/MP3 on CD-ROM

Outputs Analogue stereo, optical/coaxial digital, headphones

Other connections Marantz remote control in/out

Accessories supplied System remote handset

Dimensions (WxHxD) 30.4x10.9x31.2cm
marantz.co.uk

connections allow both units to be operated from the same handset.

Under the lid, this is very much a high-end Marantz player but smaller, with 192kHz/24bit CS4398 digital-to-analogue conversion from Cirrus Logic, selected audio components throughout the audio signal path, and of course the company's HDAM Hyper-Dynamic Amplifier Modules. Used in place of the off-the-shelf 'amp on a chip' solutions used in some other manufacturers'

This little player can match all but the very best machines in the mid-market arena

designs, these miniature amplifiers are built from separate components for optimal sound quality. The versions here are the latest HDAM-SA2s, found in flagship Marantz products, and HDAM technology is also used in the player's dedicated headphone amplifier, which is designed to drive even demanding headphones. It has its own three-step gain control, and also a separate volume adjustment.

The build here extends to a high-quality aluminium front panel, a dual-layer anti-vibration base with compliant feet and a rigid top-plate, while the power supply

is a high-current, high-speed design for excellent dynamics, and both the analogue and electrical digital outputs are gold-plated. The player comes in the usual choice of black or 'silver-gold'.

PERFORMANCE

I tried the HD-CD1 in my reference system and with the partnering HD-AMP1, in the latter case testing it with both an analogue connection between the two and with the player acting purely as a CD transport into the amp's coaxial digital input, making use of the HD-AMP1's excellent ESS Sabre32 internal conversion. The upshot of my listening is that the player is excellent when used as just that – a player – but gets even better when used in concert with the £799 amplifier. Playing a range of discs old and new, the HD-CD1 delivers a sound that's unmistakably Marantz in its combination of a big, deep but tightly controlled bass, smooth and expressive midband and fine sense of sound stage focus and three-dimensionality.

Using a mix of standard discs and CD-quality downloads burnt to CD-R media, I enjoyed the way the player placed soloists out in free space and spread orchestras between and beyond the speakers. With high-quality partners and a set-up optimised for the best possible stereo effect, this little player can match all but the very best machines in the mid-market arena, and has a speed and dynamic ability that wouldn't be out of place in much more expensive hardware. What's more, it proves a very adept partner for a pair of headphones: with the highly revealing Focal Spirit Professional model the HD-CD1 delivered levels of detail quite remarkable for a player at this level, and quite remarkable dynamic attack and slam.

Combine the player with the matching amplifier's digital section and things move up another notch, the stereo image snapping into even sharper focus, the sense of space in the sound more palpable and the bass seemingly gaining weight and extension without losing any of that speed and drive. Rhythms move just a little more smartly thanks to the cleaner sound, and the recorded acoustic is more clearly delineated. Like the other Marantz MusicLink components, the HD-CD1 may look like hi-fi in miniature but its sound is anything but small. Thoroughly recommended. **G**

Oranges & Lemons

of Battersea

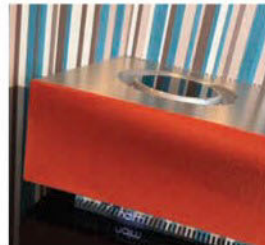
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● ESSAY

'A vintage year, with the promise of more to come'

2016 saw an impressive range of new product launches, says Andrew Everard



Streaming products were to the fore in 2016, from Naim's little Mu-so speaker and the HEOS multiroom range all the way through to the Plato all-in-one network music system

As has become traditional in January issues of *Gramophone*, I've been taking a look back over the past year of audio reviewing to pick out some of the plums, and also forward a little to what's to come in 2017.

Things started extremely well in January with two very significant products on test: one was the tiny Chord Mojo portable digital-to-analogue converter/headphone amplifier, made by the British company using the same technology as its flagship DAVE DAC, and with a striking combination of all-metal casework and 'powerball' illuminated controls for input selection and volume adjustment. Attending the launch late in 2015, I was aware that Chord Electronics had taken something of a flier on this one, counting on huge sales numbers – and I'm glad to report that so far Mojo seems to be doing very nicely indeed. Also doing well is the HEOS wireless multiroom system from the people behind the Denon brand: the products are picking up some momentum and gaining better performance in their new HS2 versions.

February saw Audiolab returning to its core values with the very good 8300-series CD player and amplifier, while Bowers & Wilkins, not content with launching its latest-generation 800-series speakers, also rolled out its excellent P5 wireless headphones, showing distinct signs of influence from the speaker range. By the way, the Worthing company is one of several marking significant anniversaries this year – it's 50 years since the brand was first launched.

In March I reviewed the fine-sounding 'hi-fi in miniature' Marantz HD-AMP1 DAC/amplifier, and this month we come full circle with the matching CD player, the HD-CD1. They make a very potent little system.

Naim's compact Mu-so Qb took centre stage in April, proving that the all-in-one concept of the original Mu-so scaled

down very nicely into a perfect system for the kitchen or study, while May saw the restyled Quad Artera range proving every bit as accomplished as the company's past products, with fine performance whether with CD or other sources. I also listened to the little Korg DS-DAC-10R, offering both digital-to-analogue conversion and vinyl-to-digital, as well as opening up the Prime Seat online concert streaming service from Japan.

June saw more temptation from the yet-to-be-realised MQA audio format, in the shape of Meridian's little Explorer2 DAC/headphone amp, while in July I finally got my hands on the much-vaunted AVI DM5 active speakers, and rather liked what I heard.

B&W is among the companies marking anniversaries this year – it's 50 years since the brand was launched

In August some more small speakers, in the form of Neat's innovative Iota Alpha miniature floorstanders developed from its original tiny Iota speakers, caught my attention – and I'm still using the little upwards-firing models as one of my reference pairs. And I also tasted the future with the little XDP-100R pocket music player from Pioneer, complete with extended format capability all the way up into DSD, and plenty of power to drive even the most demanding headphones – not to mention also making a credible 'main system' source.

The September issue saw an impressive upmarket pairing from Denon in the form of its 1520NE 'new era' CD player and amplifier, while in the Awards issue I welcomed a real return to form for Rotel with the big, powerful and sensibly priced RA-1592 amplifier. Combining the latest digital input flexibility with good old-fashioned power and control, the Rotel

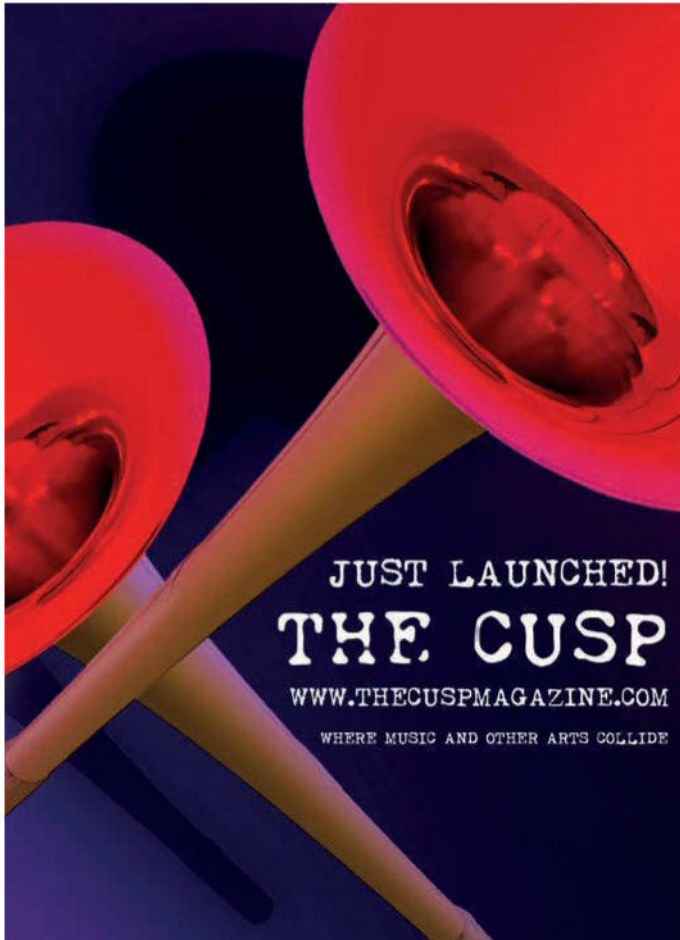
would make an excellent cornerstone for many a system: it's another one that seems to have stuck around in my set-up, and I find myself returning to it rather often.

October's featured review was the British-built Plato from Convert Technologies, which combines digital ripping and recording with playback and streaming, all wrapped up in a simple, intuitive Android-based interface designed to make the system a delight to use.

There's a range of versions available, from a simple model designed to be used with external amplification all the way through to the flagship Plato Class A, and having used several models now, I'm impressed with both the design and the performance.

In fact, the Plato was the first of several 'streaming' products to go through these pages in recent months, including the excellent Musical Fidelity M6 Encore last month and this month's Arcam Solo Music, not to mention the Technics SU-C550 system in November. Also in November I went back to basics with one of the keystones of the affordable hi-fi market in the form of the Marantz CD6006/PM6006 pairing of CD player and amplifier. I was pleased to report that sometimes 'keeping it simple' pays dividends, and greatly enjoyed the honesty and involvement delivered by these components.

So what's on the horizon? Well, I'm very much looking forward to getting both hands and ears on the new flagship products from the other end of the Marantz range, the SA10 and PM10: the SACD/CD player DAC in particular has some intriguing technology when it comes to the way digital files are handled, and initial listening has been encouraging. I'm also looking forward to hearing just what Naim's 'platform for the future' can do in the Salisbury company's new Uniti range: again, what I've heard so far has been impressive, and I'm looking forward to bringing you a review of the first of the new products in the very near future. **G**



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Praise for Mozart 225...

On the strength of the extensive information contained in David Thresher's October review (page 90), I splashed out on 'Mozart 225: The New Complete Edition'. As soon as I opened the box, I could see it was value for money. Currently, I am playing the symphonies, and I shall continue using DT's article as a tutorial to this magnificent set.

Mike Leigh

Wollaton, Nottingham

...and some reservations

I wonder about the continued prominence of the alleged portrait of Mozart by Doris Stock. I can find no evidence that this portrait had any circulation before the death of Mozart's son Karl Thomas in 1858, the last person who could possibly have authenticated it – nor does it closely resemble other (authentic) portraits of the adult Mozart where the nose, for example, is much bigger. Might one suspect commercial opportunism hinging round Karl Thomas's death?

I am also a bit dubious about the newly discovered work *Per la ricuperata salute di Ofelia*, K477a (celebrating the recovery from illness of Nancy Storace, the first Susanna in *Figaro*) being included among the authentic works. While this has been taken as evidence of the collaborative friendship of Mozart and Salieri among a triumvirate of composers, the name of the third composer 'Cornetti' (little horns) suggests satirical intent. Nor is there anything in its one minute and 20 seconds to suggest the striking presence of more than a single compositional hand.

John Stone

London N22

Attacca – or not?

I was fascinated by Edward Seckerson's comment, in his review of 'The Tchaikovsky Project, Vol 1' by the Czech PO and Semyon Bychkov on Decca (October, page 47), that in the *Pathétique* Symphony the final *Adagio* should follow 'pretty much *attacca*', thus carrying forward the 'intensity of the march' and exacting 'a shocking contrast into the finale'.

A couple of years ago, I attended an unforgettable performance in Liverpool of Mahler's Ninth – admittedly a different symphony but one with a comparable

Letter of the Month



The Swedish soprano Elisabeth Söderström as Adina in Donizetti's *L'elisir d'amore*

Remembering Elisabeth Söderström

Many thanks for the very fine Icons portrait of Elisabeth Söderström by Andrew Mellor (November, page 58). Without doubt, Söderström was one of the great singing actors of the second half of the 20th century. The only thing I miss in the article is a reference to one of Söderström's greatest parts: the Marschallin in Richard Strauss's *Der Rosenkavalier*, a part she sang at the Met, in Dallas and Paris and at many other opera houses. She would have sung it at Covent Garden too, had five sold-out performances not been cancelled due to an orchestra strike.

Mellor mentions Söderström's 1978 autobiography, which was translated into English a year later. A lovely

book – I think I have read it at least four times and I shall most certainly read it again! Lesser known outside Sweden is her later, and much more extensive, autobiography *Sjung ut – Elisabeth!* ('Sing out – Elisabeth!'), which is filled with very interesting details about her lifelong career. The author tells us about her early education, and the conductors, singers and directors she has worked with, all written with warmth and humour. It's a tragedy that this eminent book hasn't been translated into English – opera lovers and musicians all over the world would be delighted!

Dag Kyndel

Stockholm, Sweden

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groundplan. The RLPO under Vasily Petrenko started the final *Adagio* with the merest hint of a pause after the frenetic and violent conclusion of the third movement. The effect was shattering, immediately reducing several people near me to tears.

I have often since wondered if Mahler's score asks for this or whether there is an authentic performance tradition for this practice? Perhaps more knowledgeable

Gramophone readers may be better informed on this subject!

Roger Ainsworth

Penzance, Cornwall

Editorial note

In our Competitions feature (December, page 47), the correct number of unique users Medici TV attracted via its streaming of the 2015 International Tchaikovsky Competition is more than 2.25 million.

OBITUARIES

A pioneering countertenor and a groundbreaking composer

RUSSELL OBERLIN

Countertenor

Born October 11, 1928

Died November 25, 2016



The American countertenor who, alongside his British counterpart Alfred Deller, was integral to the early music movement in the post-war years, has died aged 88. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Oberlin was not simply a tenor singing falsetto. 'I have a naturally high tenor voice which enables me to sing the countertenor repertoire without resorting to falsetto voice', he said.

Oberlin was born in Akron, Ohio, and was soon performing as a treble in the church choir and further afield. He started singing professionally at the age of six, one of his first assignments being to provide the vocals for a radio jingle advertising toilet paper. At the age of 12, he won a nationwide radio talent show, and he went on to study as a high tenor at the Juilliard School in New York. He graduated in 1951 and soon became an important figure in Noah Greenberg's Pro Musica Antiqua, which celebrated the repertoire of the Middle Ages, Renaissance and Baroque periods. It was Greenberg who encouraged Oberlin to switch to countertenor: 'I simply found that the more I sang the higher parts the easier they became', Oberlin told a newspaper in 1961. 'I can sing falsetto, but I really can't go much higher that way than I can otherwise, and the quality is not the same.'

That quality – rich and seamless across a range of more than two octaves and without a hint of Anglican 'hootiness' – led to numerous professional engagements throughout the 1950s and '60s, with Pro Musica (both at home and on foreign tours), opera companies, orchestras (including the New York Philharmonic) and ensembles. He also performed incidental music by Leonard Bernstein and Lee Hoiby on Broadway.

The bulk of his repertoire was early music by the likes of Handel, Dowland and Byrd, but he also sang new music including the role of Oberon in Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The part had been written for Deller, who had premiered it at Aldeburgh in 1960, and he was greatly offended when Oberlin was invited to sing the role at Covent

Garden a year later (Oberlin also took the role in the North American premieres in Vancouver and San Francisco).

Oberlin was in demand as a recording artist, too. His first recordings were of medieval music on what became the Lyrichord label, and he went on to record the music of Purcell, Bach, Handel and Schumann – including Bach's *Magnificat* and Handel's *Messiah* with Bernstein, who would later write the countertenor part in his *Chichester Psalms* for Oberlin.

Owing to ill-health, Oberlin took early retirement in 1966 at the age of 38. He did continue to teach, however – most significantly at the Hunter College of the City University of New York. He also appeared as a lecturer and lecture-recitalist at colleges and universities throughout the US and abroad.

PAULINE OLIVEROS

Composer and accordionist

Born May 30, 1932

Died November 25, 2016



The influential composer and accordionist Pauline Oliveros has died at the age of 84.

She was a pupil of Robert Erikson and became a co-director of the San Francisco Tape Music Center in the early 1960s, which was founded by Morton Subotnick and Ramon Sender (and also engaged composers Steve Reich and Terry Riley).

In the 1970s Oliveros moved towards meditative improvisation – sonic meditations – and text-based scores. One of these pieces, called *Native*, consists simply of the instruction: 'Take a walk at night. Walk so silently that the bottoms of your feet become ears.'

In 1989 her album 'Deep Listening' was released. Recorded the year before in the hugely reverberant acoustic of an underground cistern with a reverberation time of 45 seconds, Oliveros produced drone-based improvisations on her accordion alongside the trombonist Stuart Dempster and vocalist/sound artist Panaiotis. Her aim was to encourage the listener to focus not just on the music but on the space around the music and the extra-musical sounds. In 1989, John Cage said: 'Through Pauline Oliveros and "Deep Listening" I finally know what harmony is... It's about the pleasure of making music.'

NEXT MONTH
FEBRUARY 2017



Celebrating the art of Christian Gerhaher

The German baritone has triumphed in Tannhäuser, Orfeo and Wozzeck, but Hugo Shirley meets him as he prepares to release his latest Lieder recording, Brahms's *Die schöne Magelone*

Anders Hillborg

The Swedish composer has returned home for a new recording by the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic of a work he wrote for Renée Fleming. Andrew Mellor finds out more

Bach's Flute Sonatas

Caroline Gill explores Bach's six flute sonatas and recommends the very best available recordings

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ALBION albionrecords.org

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ALIA VOX alia-vox.com

Anonymous Llibre Vermell de Montserrat (pp2013). *Hespèren XXI/Capella Reial de Catalunya/Savall.* ⑆ ⑧ ① ② **AVSA9919**

ALPHA outhere-music.com/alpha

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ARTA czecheverything.co.uk

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Sørensen Mignon - Orch Wks. *Gislinge/Lapland CO/Storgårds.* ⑆ **8 226134**

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dB PRODUCTIONS

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Maier Wks, Vol 1. *Helsingborg SO/Stoehr.* ⑆ **DBCD174**

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Strauss, R Frau ohne Schatten (p1963). *Sols incl Thomas & Bjoner/Bavarian St Orch/Keilberth.* ③ **ELQ480 7206**
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Bartók Pf Conc No 1 **Mozart** Pf Concs Nos 12 & 27 (r/pp1962). **Serkin**. (F) ④ **PRD250 350**

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Schumann Sym No 3 **Tchaikovsky** Sym No 2 (pp1956-58). *Philh Orch/Giulini*. (F) ④ **DSD350 135**

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Peerson Treatie of Human Love. *Fagiolini/Fretwork/Johnstone*. (F) **REGCD497**

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Mark Constantine

The founder of cosmetics company Lush on launching his own label and finding simple pleasure in birdsong

As a child I sang in a church choir twice on Sundays, and also at school. 'O for the wings of a dove' and all those fairly classic sort of child solos were my first introduction to classical music. I heard a lot of organ music, a lot of choral music, and a lot of religious music. This, and orchestral film scores, was how I first got going in music really.

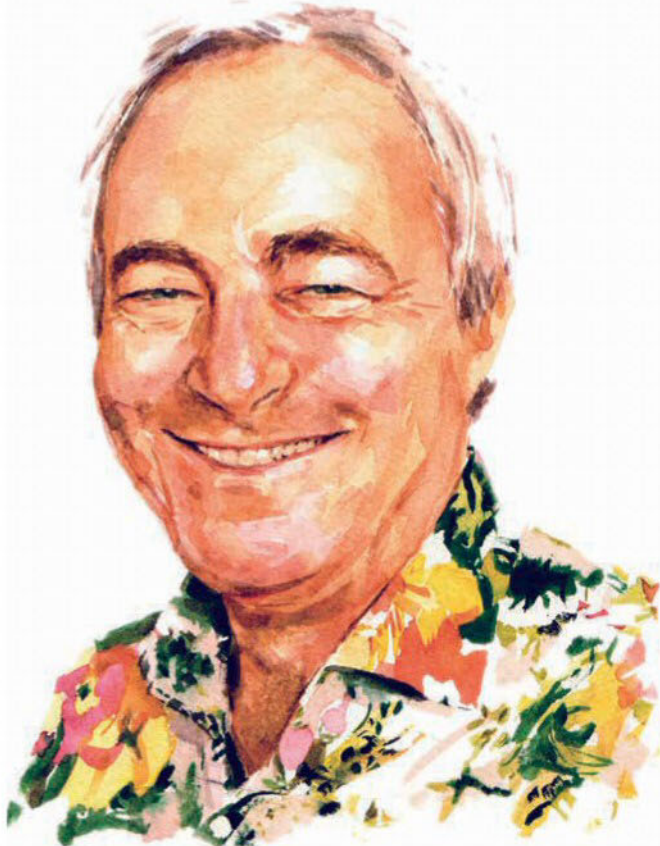
Music is a huge part of my life. Even in management I'll just resort to playing a track to someone to try and get my point across. I was once so sick of one of my very senior people keeping on telling me what he was going to do, that I played 'Show me' from *My Fair Lady* – it's become quite a big joke between us, but at the time I think he found it quite offensive!

I'm quite a keen cyclist and with my wife – at the time she was my girlfriend – we once cycled round a lot of youth hostels. We ended up in one where the warden was really keen on classical music and woke everyone up as he conducted it with a wooden spoon. We became very good friends and through him got to understand a lot more.

I'm very keen on birdsong. I'm also a bird watcher, but there wasn't a very clear understanding of the science of birdsong. So I wrote a book about how to listen – not so much how do you identify a blackbird or mistle thrush, but how do you listen to the acoustic, how do echoes work, how do birds listen? The way that birds listen is so fascinating – loudness and quietness really have very little effect on them. They're listening for degradation in the other songs. They're really taking it apart frequency by frequency and working out how far away that bird is from them. So it's almost alien for us when we're listening, as we're obviously listening in a different way.

If I could take your readers, I would just ask them to expand their listening just that little bit and listen to birdsong. It's not a replacement for classical music, it could actually enhance their listening. There is a particular kind of American thrush that seems to place the notes in the air, as if three-dimensionally, and I can't think of any composer where I've felt that sense. It's the silence around it I suppose.

When I'm listening to music, I actually want to *listen*. I have my hi-fi, I have the speakers, I have the chair positioned exactly where I want – and I listen. I set up my label – ECC100 Records – because I was almost grieving the loss of information I once had. Having been dazzled by all the recent technology, I suddenly woke up and realised that I was listening to stuff that was almost half the quality of what I was listening to before. When I first left home – and I didn't leave in very good circumstances, I was homeless for a period – most of the time, when I wasn't working, I was staring at hi-fis that I would one day own. Bang & Olufsen were the



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Bach Cello Suite No 6 in D, BWV1012

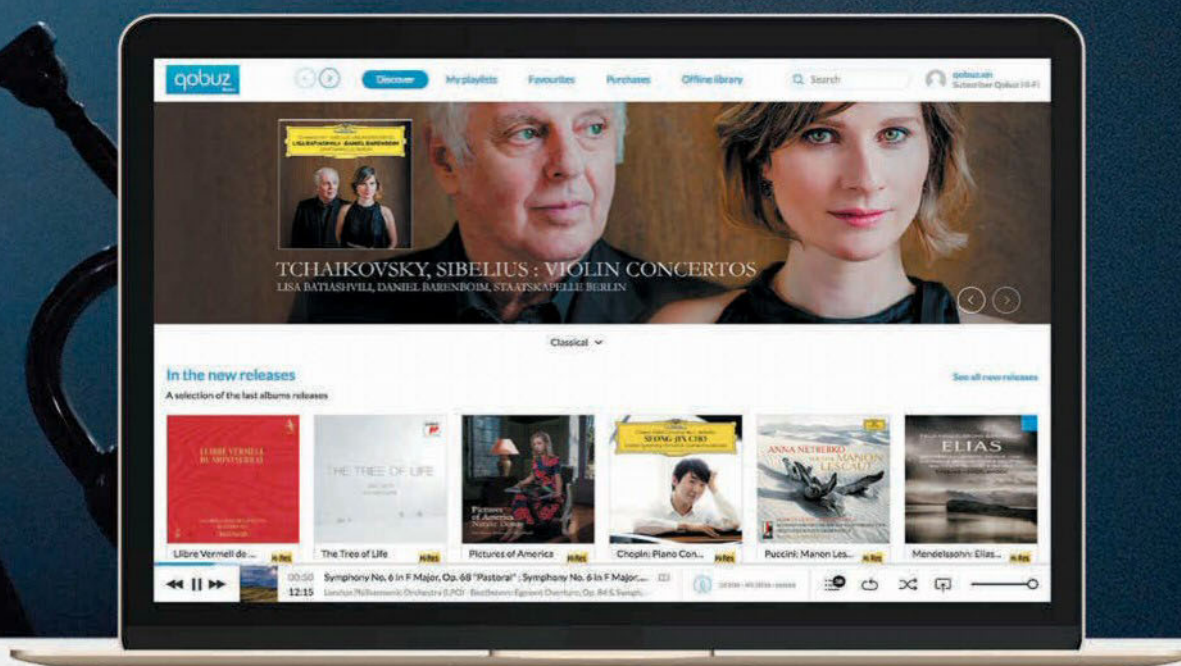
Yo-Yo Ma vc Sony Classical

Yo-Yo Ma explores unexpected collaborations of great variety outside of the classical genre. This resonates with me as I similarly have eclectic tastes.

thing in the 1970s, and I would just dream of that! But 10 or 15 years ago, everything got disrupted and somehow I lost a grip on a quality listening experience, and I now I've consciously put it back in my life.

I work with my son Simon, and we're both perfumers, so every couple of years we produce a show – not necessarily of commercial fragrance, but fragrance as art. And in this particular instance Simon created perfumes inspired by burial mounds and various stone structures in and around Dorset. Then, on a site just outside Wareham, we put up some standing stones which we bought from Purbeck. About nine feet tall, all lifted in with a crane. Then we scented the stones, and at the same time we commissioned John Metcalfe and Simon Richmond to write pieces of music, and the idea was that it would all meld into one experience. That was called *Set in Stone*, and since then they've worked on the original pieces and turned them into a really lovely light classical piece of work. A videographer came along and filmed the places with the music. Just a nice, lazy exploration of all sorts of arts, all combined. **G**
'Set in Stone' is available on ECC100 Records

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